



1985-09-19 -Ritual and Daily Life of Ismailis -Thesis (996)

All Items on <https://archive.org/details/realpatidar>



realpatidar.com

Full Library on <https://realpatidar.com/library>



RITUAL AND DAILY LIFE:
TRANSMISSION AND INTERPRETATION
OF THE ISMAILI TRADITION IN VANCOUVER.

by

PARIN AZIZ DOSSA

B.A., Makerere University, 1969
M.A., University Of Edinburgh, 1971

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in the Department
of
Anthropology and Sociology

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

May, 1983.

Parin Aziz Dossa, 1985

22

realpatidar.com



Real Patidar Library

<https://www.realpatidar.com/library>

This book/literature/article/material may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The library does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The library shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand, or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.realpatidar.com>

About Real Patidar books

Real Patidar's mission is to organize the information on Satpanth religion, which is a Nizari Ismaili sect of Shia branch of Islam, and to make it universally accessible and useful. Real Patidar Books helps readers discover the material on Satpanth online while helping authors and researchers in their studies. You can know more by visiting <http://www.realpatidar.com>

You can resize and move this box in any PDF Application like Adobe Acrobat Reader.

No specific pages. See whole book.
References by: RealPatidar.com



1985-09-19 -Ritual and Daily Life of Ismailis -Thesis (996)

realpatidar.com

RITUAL AND DAILY LIFE:
TRANSMISSION AND INTERPRETATION
OF THE ISMAILI TRADITION IN VANCOUVER.

by

PARIN AZIZ DOSSA

B.A., Makerere University, 1969
M.A., University Of Edinburgh, 1971

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in the Department
of
Anthropology and Sociology

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

May, 1983.

Parin Aziz Dossa, 1985

22

realpatidar.com



1985-09-19 -Ritual and Daily Life of Ismailis -Thesis (996)

realpatidar.com

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the head of my department or by his or her representatives. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Department of Anthropology & Sociology

The University of British Columbia
1956 Main Mall
Vancouver, Canada
V6T 1Y3

Date 19th Sept, 1985

realpatidar.com

DE-6 (3/81)



Abstract

This dissertation explores, within a framework provided by tradition and change, how Ismailis in Vancouver, primarily a religious community, formerly localized and spatially concentrated in East Africa, have been affected by migration into a secular state where they are spatially dispersed.

Ismaili tradition is explicated through history and a recourse to documentary materials including the Qur'an, gīnāns or compositions, firmāns or guidances of the Imām (spiritual leader), and the rituals of the community. The chief feature of tradition may be identified as an overarching cosmology dichotomized as zāhir and bāṭin, glossed respectively as material (multiplicity and activity) and spiritual (unity and repose) in strict complementarity, the parts of which are activated through a spatial and a temporal movement from and to exteriority (zāhir) and interiority (bāṭin). Daily life, family, kin, community rituals and prayers at Jamā'āt Khāna (place of assembly), and the firmāns reflect the complementarities and mediate them. Change is examined in relation to the same features as well as culinary practices which, as do the rituals, further reveal the complementarities between material and spiritual and the ways in which they are mediated. The changing roles and interrelationships of elders, men and women, and youth emphasize changes taking place.

The major finding of the study is that the tradition, which was a complex of strict complementarities, has now become compartmentalized, diluting the force of the complementary relationship. This appears as a function of increased participation in the "technical" time (confining social relationships) of external public life as opposed to the "core culture" time



(promoting social relationships) of the internal home life of families, and in the attitudes of Ismailis who are accommodating to the larger society and are exclusive in their community life. In addition, women's entry in the public labour force, and a growing separation between youth and adults as well as elders, have significantly affected community rituals, attendance in Jamā'at Khāna, and familial relationships. While it might be thought that new sets of dialectics are being engaged, this does not in fact appear to be the case. Contraries and contradictions, which might have been thought to imply a dialectic, remain as they were enforcing a further compartmentalization of life choices.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1	The Question And The Setting.	1.
Part I: Cosmology.		
Chapter 2	Substantive Features Of Ismaili Cosmology.	35.
Part II: Ritual.		
Chapter 3	Articulation Of Enclosed Space In The <u>Jamā'āt Khāna.</u>	63.
Chapter 4	Ritual Performances: 'Structure And Communitas'.	93.
Chapter 5	<u>Ghaṭ-pāt</u> : Formation And Activation Of A Cognitive Model.	131.
Part III: Daily Life.		
Chapter 6	Food And Cosmos.	168.
Chapter 7	Nurturing And Career Roles Of Women.	208.
Chapter 8	Continuity And Change: Life Histories Of Ismaili Elders, Adults And Youth.	239.
Chapter 9	Conclusion.	279.
Bibliography		289.
Appendix:	Fieldwork: Data And Methods	297.



LIST OF TABLES

Table

I.	<u>Jamā'āt Khāna</u> Attendance - Individuals.	74.
II.	<u>Jamā'āt Khāna</u> Attendance - Families.	74.
III.	Background Information On Respondents.	117.
IV.	Dietary Habits Of Ismailis.	225.
V.	Career Occupations of Women.	233.
VI.	Residential Patterns Of Ismailis In East Africa And Vancouver.	245.
VII.	Major Characteristics Of Elderly Respondents.	252.
VIII.	Traditional And Modern Attitudes And Practices.	259.
IX.	Attendance In <u>Jamā'āt Khāna</u> .	260.
X.	Recreational Activities - Adults And Children.	262.
XI.	Communal Involvement Of Young Adults.	271.
XII.	Major Characteristics Of Respondent Households.	300.



LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Diagrams:

2-1.	Hierarchical Orders Formulated In The Works Of Ismaili Writers.	42.
2-2.	Man As A Microcosmic Being.	43.
2-3.	Narrative On Creation: Man's Descent On Earth.	49.
3-4.	Life Cycle Of An Ismaili Woman As Depicted In The Attire.	68.
3-5.	Cognitive Model Of Ismaili World View As Represented By The Family.	71.
3-6.	'Journey' To <u>Jamā'āt Khāna</u> .	78.
3-7.	Articulation Of Enclosed Space In The <u>Jamā'āt Khāna</u> .	87.
4-8.	Body Imagery As Encoded In The Ceremony Of <u>Hay-Zindā, Kayam Payā</u> .	96.
4-9.	Transformation Of Self Effected Through Verbal Exchange.	99.
4-10.	Ceremony Of <u>Du'a Karawi</u> - The Setting.	102.
4-11.	Ceremony Of <u>Du'a Karawi</u> - Progressive Stages Of Movement And Repose.	103.
4-12.	Verbal Communication In The Ceremony.	105.
4-13.	"Movement" Of <u>Nandi</u> .	114.
4-14.	Cosmic Dimension - Life Cycle Of An Individual.	116.
5-15.	Ceremony Of <u>Ghaṭ-Pāt</u> - The Setting.	133.
5-16.	Symbol Of White As Encoded In The Life Cycle Of Individuals.	135.
5-17.	The Arrangement Of <u>Ghaṭ-pāt</u> .	142.
5-18.	Enactment Of A Primordial Event In The Ceremony Of <u>Ghaṭ-Pāt</u> .	147.
5-19.	Body Imagery In The Ceremony Of <u>Ghaṭ-Pāt</u> .	150.
5-20.	Formation And Activation Of The Cognitive Model.	154.
6-21.	Traditional Ismaili Menu.	171.
6-22.	Canadian/Traditional Menu.	172.



1985-09-19 -Ritual and Daily Life of Ismailis -Thesis (996)

realpatidar.com

vii

6-23.	Types Of Light Foods As Included In The Traditional Menu.	184.
6-24.	Geometrical Motifs In The Arrangement Of <u>Ghaṭ-Pāṭ</u> .	191.
6-25.	Unleavened Bread As Mediator Of Light And Heavy Foods.	194.
6-26.	The Culinary Triangle.	197.
6-27.	Principle Of Contraries And Mediation As Represented In The Methods Of Cooking.	199.
6-28.	Correlation Of Mealtimes With Material And Spiritual Worlds.	204.
6-29.	Cognitive Framework Perceived In Ritual And The Culinary System.	206.
7-30.	Compartmentalization Between The Traditional Life Of Women And Work.	236.
8-31.	Model Of Ismaili Cosmos: 'Journey Of Man'.	248.
8-32.	Perception Of Canadian Life: Elders, Adults, Youth.	274.

realpatidar.com



1985-09-19 -Ritual and Daily Life of Ismailis -Thesis (996)

realpatidar.com

viii

Acknowledgements

The field research on which this thesis is based was carried out in Vancouver in the year 1982-1983. My greatest debts are to the Ismailis of Vancouver who were both gracious and generous in welcoming me to their homes. I should like them to know that I appreciate their kindness, patience and understanding shown to me while I was in the field. In particular I would like to mention the contributions of Sultanali Nazarali and Amirali Amlani for their assistance in providing literary materials and sharing with me their views on the ritual tradition of the Ismailis.

I would like to express my thanks to my supervisor, Professor Kenelm Burridge whose work and thought have influenced my thinking. Professor Burridge's contributions are absorbed into the general discourse and I acknowledge with gratitude his help and support. I have also gained from the encouragement and intellectual insights of other scholars notably, Professor Cyril Belshaw, Professor Hanna Kassis and Professor Brenda Beck. I have benefited also from the discussions with my colleague Dr. Pamela Peck.

Finally, without the continual support and inspiration of my husband Aziz, our children Fahreen and Zahwil, and my parents, this work would not have come to fruition.

realpatidar.com



Glossary

Terms not included are those which appear but once and the meanings of which have been defined in the text.

<u>ab-i shafā</u>	A Persian term used for the ritual of the drinking of "sacred water", also known as <u>ghat-pāt</u> (q.v.).
<u>barakāt</u>	Blessing sent to man by God. Among Ismailis the <u>Imām</u> (q.v.) is endowed with <u>barakāt</u> which can be transmitted to his followers.
<u>bātin</u>	Inner or esoteric meaning behind that of the literal word. Opposite of <u>zāhir</u> (q.v.).
<u>dā'i</u>	"One who summons". Among Ismailis, one who propagates the faith.
<u>da'wah</u>	The institution charged with preaching and propagating the Ismaili cause.
<u>du'a</u>	Daily ritual prayer.
<u>du'a karawi</u>	Ritual ceremony performed inside the <u>Jamā'āt Khāna</u> (q.v.) prior to or soon after congregational prayers.
<u>firmān</u>	Directive issued only by the <u>Imām</u> .
<u>ghat-pāt</u>	A Sanskrit term used for the Ismaili ritual of the drinking of "sacred water". In Persian, the ritual is referred to as <u>ab-i shafā</u> (q.v.).
<u>gīnān</u>	Meditative or contemplative knowledge, referring to the literary corpus of the compositions attributed to the <u>pīrs</u> (q.v.).
<u>Hay Zindā, Kayam payā</u>	Ritual ceremony performed at the threshold of the <u>Jamā'āt Khāna</u> (q.v.).
<u>Imām</u>	Used exclusively by Ismailis, to denote the descendants of Ali, the first <u>Imām</u> , son in-law and cousin of the Prophet. The term connotes the idea of a spiritual leader who is present at all times.
<u>Jamā'āt Khāna</u>	Place of congregation, the center of communal, religious and social activity; "mosque" in the Ismaili sense.



1985-09-19 -Ritual and Daily Life of Ismailis -Thesis (996)

realpatidar.com

x

<u>Kamadiyāh</u>	Literally "treasurer"; assistant of the <u>Mukhī</u> (q.v.).
<u>Kamadiyāni</u>	Female assistant of <u>Mukhyāni</u> (q.v.).
<u>kumbh</u>	Vessel used in the ceremony of <u>ghat-pāt</u> (q.v.).
<u>Mukhī</u>	Male leader appointed to conduct prayers and ritual ceremonies in the <u>Jamā'āt Khāna</u> .
<u>Mukhyāni</u>	Female (usually the wife of <u>Mukhī</u> [q.v.]) who conducts ceremonies which require individual female participation in the <u>Jamā'āt Khāna</u> (q.v.).
<u>nandi</u>	Food offerings taken to <u>Jamā'āt Khāna</u> (q.v.).
<u>niya</u>	"Intention" referring to the beginning of religious acts.
<u>niyāz</u>	"Sacred water".
<u>nūr</u>	Light connoting the notion of the Divine; the term is given central significance in Ismaili thought.
<u>pāt</u>	Low rectangular table placed in <u>Jamā'āt Khāna</u> (q.v.) for the purpose of ritual ceremonies.
<u>pīr</u>	Meaning 'elder'; among Ismailis the term is used for the <u>dā'īs</u> (q.v.) who propagated the Ismaili cause on the Subcontinent.
<u>roshni</u>	Gujerati term connoting illumination.
<u>sari</u>	Female attire (Indian origin) covering head/shoulders to feet.
<u>sūfi</u>	Mystic.
<u>Shī'a</u>	The branch of Muslims who acknowledge Ali and his descendants as spiritual leaders (<u>Imāms</u> q.v.) of the community.
<u>taqiya</u>	The practice of concealing one's beliefs for exigent reasons.
<u>tawhīd</u>	"To declare that God is One".
<u>ta'wīl</u>	Allegorical interpretations of religious doctrines primarily connected with the function of the <u>Imām</u> (q.v.).
<u>zāhir</u>	The external literal sense applied to revelation. Opposite of <u>bātin</u> (q.v.).

realpatidar.com



Transliteration

The transliteration used is that of The Library Of Congress for Gujarati. This system was chosen because it corresponds closely with the spoken Gujarati used by the Ismailis in Vancouver.

ka	ક	ta	ટ	da	ડ	ya	ય
kha	ખ	tha	ઠ	dha	ઢ	ra	ર
ga	ગ	da	ડ	na	ન	la	લ
gha	ઘ	dha	ઢ	ta	ત	la	લ
ca	ચ	na	ન	tha	થ	va	વ
cha	છ	pa	પ	da	દ	sa	સ
ja	જ	pha	ફ	dha	ધ	sha	શ
jha	ઝ	ba	બ	na	ન	sa	સ
ta	ટ	bha	ભ	ha	હ		
tha	ઠ	ma	મ				

Vowels And Diphthongs

a	અ	e	ઐ
ā	આ	ai	ઐ
i	ઇ	o	ઔ
ī	ઈ	au	ઔ
u	ઉ	ū	ઊ

Notes.

1. Terms which have become part of the English language are rendered as they appear in English, (for example: Ismaili for Ismā'īlī).
2. Terms which appear in Arabic or Persian have followed the transliteration scheme of the Library of Congress.



Chapter 1

The Question And The Setting

The Question Defined

This dissertation considers tradition and change among Ismailis in Vancouver. The Ismailis are Shi'a-Muslims and form a minority group in the twenty-five countries where they reside. Over the last fifteen years, about nine thousand Ismailis have settled in the greater Vancouver area, mainly from East Africa. Given this background, the main question is: How is a religious community, here the Ismailis, formerly localized and spatially concentrated, affected by migration to a secular Western state?

In its most elementary sense, tradition is 'anything which is transmitted or handed down from the past to the present' (Shils 1981:12). The key word here is transmission defined in terms of a 'two fold historicity': the transmission and sedimentation of tradition and the interpretation of tradition (Ricoeur 1978:27).¹ Understood in this way, change forms part of a process of a dynamic interplay between transmission and interpretation.

The temporalities of transmission and interpretation provide the setting for a broader inquiry concerning space and time. The categories of space and time are interrelated as time is perceived as events in space.² It has been recognized that space and time form important and powerful modes of communication in all cultures. The seminal anthropological studies of Evans-Pritchard (1940) and Edward Hall (1959,1966,1976,1983) provide us with useful insights into the way in which time, as the 'hidden cultural grammar'



(Hall 1983:6), is organized differently in each culture. Ernst Cassirer writes:

Space and time are the framework in which all reality is concerned. We cannot conceive any real thing except under the conditions of space and time. Nothing in the world, according to Heraclitus, can exceed its measures—and these measures are spatial and temporal limitations. In mythical thought space and time are never considered as pure and empty forms. They are regarded as the great mysterious forces which govern all things, which rule and determine not only our mortal life but also the life of the gods.

To describe and analyse the specific character which space and time assume in human experience is one of the most appealing and important tasks of an anthropological philosophy.we must analyse the forms of human culture in order to discover the true character of space and time in our human world (1978:42).

In each culture the spatial and temporal experience is organized in terms of types. Hall distinguishes three types of time: formal, informal (core culture) and technical out of which one type always dominates (1959:66). Formal time is the common knowledge shared by members of a culture and is well worked into daily life. Informal time relates to situational or imprecise references where the principal model used is that of imitation. Informal (core culture) time provides the basis for the transmission of an entire system of behaviour, and is made up of 'hundreds and thousands of details' which are passed on from generation to generation and is the foundation on which interpersonal relations rest. Technical time is explicit, concentrated and requires control (1982:177). In this context, change is an interplay of a relationship between the three types of time.³ Therefore, 'the theory of the nature of these relationships is a theory of change' (ibid:87). Cassirer on the other hand focuses on symbolic space which is unique to man as it leads 'not only to a new field of knowledge but to an entirely new direction of his cultural life' (1978:43). According to Cassirer it is only through symbolic space that man could arrive at a concept of a cosmic order. Within this



realpatidar.com

3

space, time is a process involving a continuous stream of events. Implicit in this framework is the idea of time as a creative and continuous process whereby man does not only repeat his past experience but also reconstructs and organizes this experience.

Both Hall's and Cassirer's conceptions of time and space point to the importance of dynamism whereby time and space are not conceived as immutable constants but as 'a cluster of concepts, events, and rhythms covering an extremely wide range of phenomena' (Hall 1983:13). Evans-Pritchard in his account of Nuer shows how categories of time and space are derived from the rhythm of social life (1940:94-138). Time and space as an interplay of relationships (concepts, events, symbols, formal, informal, technical) can provide useful insights into the study of change and minority communities. For example, Geertz, in his study of ritual and social change among the Javanese, distinguishes between culture and social system, explicating that culture is an ordered system of meaning and of symbols in terms of which social interaction takes place; social system is the pattern of social interaction itself (1973:144). Geertz shows, through the example of a disrupted funeral, that social change can lead to an incongruity, resulting from the persistence of a religious symbol system, adjusted to peasant social structure, in an otherwise urban environment (ibid:169). An equally promising approach would be to study the disrupted funeral as an interplay of time and space in the 'religious symbol system' and in the emergent urban environment.

Fredrik Barth, in his work on: "Ethnic Groups And Boundaries" (1969:9-38), contends that the persistence of ethnic boundaries is a function of social processes of exclusion as well as incorporation. While emphasising the concept of boundary maintenance, Barth advocates a dynamic approach

realpatidar.com



whereby the boundaries need to be expressed and validated continually. This situation is necessitated by the fact that ethnic groups enter into situations of social contact with the persons of other cultures. In this respect, ethnic groups structure their interaction, leading to an interplay of prescriptions, that promote contact in some sectors of activity, and proscriptions, preventing inter-ethnic interaction in other sectors (ibid:16). The structuring of interaction at two levels: prescription and proscription can be studied through the perspective of how ethnic groups organize time and space in two contexts: inter-ethnic situations and intra-ethnic interactions. The space-time approach can yield further insights into the process of boundary maintenance.

The application of the space-time approach to the study of dynamic and even opposing forces is also advocated in other studies. For example, David Pocock (1967:303-314) shows opposed notions present in the Indian theory of time reckoning. In the case of the Patidar, a choice is made between what appears to be contradictory notions: conceptual time-reckoning which is fixed, 'repetitive eternal', and related to the order of the caste, and the individual experiences where time changes, is particular, and related to the doctrine of bhakti. Here, we have an example of a society where time is given a complicated recognition within the framework of opposition. Eickelman (1977:39-56), citing the example of a Moroccan society, advocates a dynamic approach, showing how the relationship between the Bni Battu (a tribe) and urban Moroccans can be perceived on the basis of alternative temporal conceptions: local social order and ideas. Locally, time is conceived as events in terms of sequences of irregular, 'island-like' concrete experiences; conceptually, time is anchored within a framework of the past, the present and the future. The conceptual order of time enables the Bni Battu to relate to



the larger Moroccan society. In an incisive account on the ethnography of acculturation among the Fang culture of Gabon, Fernandez shows how, in response to missionary Christianity, the Bwiti religion emerges as an achievement of 'a tying together, a time binding of old and new' (1982:568). Among other areas, Fernandez focuses on ideas of time and space (ibid:74-124; 345-410). Fernandez contends that Bwiti religion is an accomplishment of coherence, a "oneheartedness" which, among others, is a function of the linking of spatial experiences: the physiological, the natural, the social, and the cosmic and also of temporal experiences: archetypal thought, and archetypal events or personages of the past, manifesting themselves in the present and expectantly in the future (ibid:571).

Given the importance of spatial and temporal categories to the study of tradition and change (acculturation), I have focused on the Ismaili community in Vancouver because:

- (a) The Ismailis form an immigrant community where the process of transmission (tradition) and interpretation (change) can be observed more poignantly.
- (b) Various studies of Ismaili tradition and history have laid great emphasis on the structural and cultural aspects of community life.⁴ The idea that individual Ismailis relate to specific forms of their tradition and thereby generate a process of flow and feedback between a given structural system and it's subjective understanding has not been explored to date. Of special importance would be the incorporation of new elements from the host society, concerning the everyday life of the Ismailis.



The Ismailis have a history of migration for over a thousand years, extending well into the twentieth century. The acculturative experience of the Ismailis has included heights of grandeur (Fatimid times) as well as abyss of hardship and persecution (post Alamut period). Given this experience, the question which confronts me is: how does a religious community deal with and is affected by migration into a secular state? In this study, I am not concerned with a problem or a hypothesis but an explication of the above question. Given the fact that the process of secularization has had a universal impact, this question has a broader significance in relation to the way in which a tradition is transmitted and interpreted.

Among Ismailis notions of space and time are articulated through two categories: material and spiritual. Temporally, material is associated with daytime. During this time, Ismailis experience a form of life which entails multiplicity and activity. By contrast, the spiritual is associated with dawn and dusk and this mode of life is defined in terms of unity and repose. The demarcation between the two categories is reflected spatially. Jamā'at Khāna (place of congregation) and its concomitant, the community, express attributes of spiritual life. Family, kin and the outside world evoke attributes of material life. As I shall show in this study, the categories of material and spiritual contain an ambiguity. The material and spiritual are diametrically opposed; yet they cannot operate in isolation as each category is energized in the presence of its opposite. The qualities of unity and repose as embodied by the spiritual has meaning in relation to the multiplicity and activity of material life. The opposed but interrelated categories of material and spiritual are formally mediated in ritual and culinary practice. However, I show in this study that the process of mediation is a function of a spatial and a temporal movement from the spiritual to the material, generating a



complementary relationship between these two categories. Among Ismailis, space and time are experienced as an interplay of two opposing but interrelated forms: the material and the spiritual. This interplay brings into relief the way in which a tradition is transmitted and interpreted.

In this study, I show that the transmission and interpretation of the Ismaili tradition can be appreciated through formal expressions (ritual, culinary practice) in which it is embodied and through cultural constructions (everyday life situations) where it is interpreted. While I recognize the important impact of the Western environment on the Ismailis in Vancouver, this study has its centre of gravity in the Ismaili tradition itself. The continuity of this tradition and its reinterpretation is the main emphasis of my analysis.

With the advent of the twentieth century, the Ismailis were introduced into what is referred to as the 'modern period' of their history. Under the directive of their spiritual leader (the Imam), a number of changes were introduced in the economic, administrative, educational and social spheres. It was the explicit purpose of the Imam that while these changes were geared towards making the community modern ('progressive'), the latter was to be accomplished within the principles of Islam. Given the interplay between formal expressions (ritual) and their informal forms (daily life), individual Ismailis are engaged in 'working out' the implications of these changes in specific situations. It is important to note that the Ismailis living in Western countries find themselves in the domain of the culture to which they were exposed more selectively, and 'at a distance', in their original homeland in East Africa. In Canada, the process of exposure to the West is likely to be far more pervasive, especially when the exclusive nature of the community



is considerably diluted as a greater number of Ismailis (including women) are exposed to the larger society in the form of work situations, school and recreational activities. I examine the implications of this encounter in terms of tradition and change.

In the light of the above remarks, I have organized my data as follows:

The study begins with an outline of the substantive features of Ismaili cosmology (chapter 2). Here, the categories of material and spiritual are fundamental and their pervasive presence in the speculative thought, affective content and lives of individual Ismailis establishes a framework for the study of ritual and daily life. Part II proceeds to discuss the ritual tradition in which these categories are invoked. The analysis of the enclosed space in the Jamā'at Khāna (chapter 3) reveals a form of spatial integration achieved through an embodiment of meanings from various contexts: doctrinal, cosmic, and social. In chapter 4, I show that spatial integration acquires meaning in so far as the enclosed space of the Jamā'at Khāna points directly to the space symbolized by the hearts of the participants as they occupy the 'empty space'. The analysis of three ritual ceremonies image a cognitive model whereby a movement, from the outward material world of activity and multiplicity into the inward spiritual world of repose and unity, is traced through body imagery. An analysis of another ceremony (ghat-pāt), in chapter 5, reaffirms this movement through the explicit symbol of the heart. In addition, this ceremony also reveals the importance of relating the spiritual awareness of unity and repose to the material world of activity. When the participants leave Jamā'at Khāna, they undergo a temporal and a spatial transference. In their everyday lives, the Ismailis experience space and time through an outward movement, engendering a network of social relationships.



Part III commences with the daily life of the Ismailis. Here, time and space are also organized in relation to material and spiritual categories. The relationship between the two categories is depicted in the culinary practice (chapter 6) where I show how cooking effects a transformation, affirming the presence of the spiritual in an otherwise material context. Chapter 7 explicates the spatial position of women in the domestic sphere where, in their roles as wives and mothers, they embody qualities which are akin to spiritual life. The internal (kitchen) activity of women leads to the creation of open space as among Ismailis cooking is an expression of cultivation of ties with the outside world. The chapter continues to discuss the implications of the career and occupational roles assumed by Ismaili women, showing that, in actual fact, women have undergone a spatial and a temporal transference as they move from an inward space of the home to that of the outward space in the larger society. The diametrical opposition of these spaces has led to a process of compartmentalization. I continue to explore this theme in chapter 8 in relation to life cycles of individuals, which also include the cognitive model of the material and the spiritual. The elders, the adults and the youth also experience spatial and temporal incongruities in different contexts, highlighting an internal compartmentalization. The ramifications of the two forms of compartmentalizations, the external and the internal, are examined in the concluding chapter in relation to time and space in two contexts: the traditional and the emergent.



The Setting

(i) Ismaili History

The history of the Ismailis (a Shī'ā sect) is best understood through the role of the Imām (the community's spiritual leader). As the Shī'as explain it, the Imām is a possessor of a special sum of knowledge of religion ('ilm) which includes both the exoteric and the esoteric meanings of the Qur'an (Jafri 1979:289-312). The interplay of these two polarities, translated as zāher (outer) and bātin (inner) have been critical in the development of Ismaili history and doctrine. Below, I give an outline, in chronological form, of the historical background of the Ismailis in Vancouver and their doctrine. This section highlights the tradition of the Imām who encapsulates the complementarity between the zāher and the bātin and provides the background for understanding the emergent process of compartmentalization observable among Ismailis in Vancouver.

The Ismailis in common with other Shī'ā groups maintain that the Prophet's son in-law Ali and his descendants occupied the office of the Imām who is both leader of the faithful and spiritual chief of the devout. The sub-divisions among the Shī'ā have resulted over disputes concerning the rightful successor of the Imām. The Ismailis are the only Shī'ā sect who believe that the presence of the Imām is necessary at all times. The present Imām of the Ismailis is Aga Khan IV - Shah Karim al-Husseini.



(a) Early Ismailism

Two important developments in the history of the Shī'a movement took place during the time of Imām Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, who died around 765. First, Imām Ja'far al-Ṣādiq considerably influenced the crystallization of Shī'a thought and that of mystical interpretation of Islam. Secondly, after the death of the Imām a split occurred over the issue of succession. Imām Ja'far al-Ṣādiq had designated his elder son Ismail to be his successor:

Thus Ismail became the gate to God, His praying niche, the Abode of His Light, and the link between Him and His creations, the Lieutenant of God on earth.

(Ivanow tr. 1942:275).

However, a body of the Imām's followers believed that Ismail predeceased his father or that his appointment had been revoked in favour of Mūsā al-Kāẓim, Ismail's younger brother, whom they accepted as Imām. This group came to be known as Ithnā 'Asharites. The latter continued to give allegiance to five more Imāms after Musa and believe that their last (twelfth) Imām went into hiding (ghāyba) and will reappear one day. Others who paid allegiance to the elder son, Ismail came to be known as Ismailis.

One of the notable features of the Ismaili movement during this period was the creation of an organizational network which came to be known as the da'wah (summons). In a religious sense, da'wah is the summons of the Prophets to the people to believe in the true religion, Islam (Canard 1965:II:168). Among Ismailis da'wah achieved special significance both in the complexity of its organization as well as in the spread of the faith. By the end of the ninth century, the da'wah had emerged as a hierarchical organization arranged in a ranked order, the head being referred to as dā'i al-du'at , 'chief



missionary' (Ivanow 1935:37-52). Various officials within the da'wah worked in different geographical divisions known as jaza'ir. An individual agent of the da'wah was referred to as the dā'i.

From the works of Qāḍī al-Nu'mān (Ismaili writer and jurist - d. 974), and an Ismaili treatise (tr. W. Ivanow 1933), we learn that a dā'i was subjected to vigorous training and discipline. He was expected to master the intellectual sciences of the day and show a keen interest in rhetoric and diplomacy. These skills together with a keen sensibility towards spiritual life were considered to be the mark of an ideal dā'i. Thus equipped, the dā'i won converts to the Ismaili cause and spread the faith to other areas like Yamen, al-Kufa, Khurasan, Transoxiana, Sind and North Africa.

(b) The Fatimid Empire

The politico-religious goal of the dā'is achieved fruition in the establishment of the Ismaili Fatimid state in the tenth century, with its centre in Cairo, Egypt. The dynasty of the Imāms who ruled over the Empire for over two centuries extended its authority to the southern Mediterranean, (namely, Crete, Corsica, Malta and Sicily), the Levant, Hijaz and Sindh with scattered centres on the Iranian plateau. It was in this period that the Ismailis established a polity with court administration and military command, and a religious hierarchy comprising Islamic jurisprudence and an esoteric order.

There are several features of the Fatimid period which had a lasting effect on the formation of a distinctively Ismaili tradition. It was a period when the Ismailis synthesized their doctrine, established a form of political organization and proselytized their beliefs. All of these strands converged



in the role of the Imām, who stood for political and juridical authority on the one hand and esoteric knowledge on the other. In other words, the Imām's role was conceived as mediating between social and cosmological orders. In the zāhir he was the guardian of Sharī'ah (Islamic law). In the bāṭin he was the means for achieving gnostic realization.

The upsurge of intellectual activity during the Fatimid period led to the composition of numerous works. Of special interest for our purposes is the development of a conceptual framework whereby the da'wah with its hierarchical structure was anchored in a cosmic order, with the Imām at the apex. The one underlying principle which governed the cosmic order, with all its correspondences in the astral as well as terrestrial world, was that the chain of hierarchies existed as part of a single indivisible process. 'The multiplicity of all existent things had meaning only in as much as it formed an integral part of the whole system'(Nanji 1978:106-7). Among the ranks and the responsibilities worked out for each member of the elaborate hierarchy, those of the rasūl (Prophet), the Wāsi (spiritual successor) and the Imām are of special significance. The idea which was formulated and given importance was that the Ismailis have two modes of life: the bāṭin and the zāhir translated as spiritual and material respectively. This duality informs the life and thought of the Ismailis today.

The other major development of the Fatimid period were the two bifurcations that took place over the issue of succession. The first of these resulted in the formation of the Druze movement which occurred immediately after the reign of Imām al-Hakim (d.1021). Hamza, the leader of the movement, declared Imām al-Hakim as physical manifestation of God, and he and his



adherents broke away from the Fatimid Ismailis. Today, the movement has survived largely in the mountains of the Levant.

The second split occurred over the succession to the Imamat following the death of Imām Mustansir b'illah in 1094. Following the Imām's death and the rival claims to the office of the Imamat of his two sons, the Syrian and Iranian section of the Empire followed the elder son Nizar, while the Egyptian, Yemeni and Sindhi areas followed the younger son Musta'li. The Musta'lians transferred the center of the da'wah to Yemen and then to India. The Nizari Ismailis moved to Iran where the fortress of Alamut became their principal center.



(c) The Ismailis Of Alamut

The Nizari Ismaili movement entered a phase of increased vigor in Persia. Here, the Ismailis established a polity (1090-1256) consisting of a widely dispersed series of forts with a focal point at Alamut, in the district of Rudbar in the Alburz mountains. Medieval historians mention a number of forty to fifty forts (Ivanow 1938b:383). The state did not have an independent economic base, unlike the Fatimids who had agrarian wealth and seafaring trade (Hodgson 1974:22), and functioned in the face of the overwhelming military strength of the Saljuq government. The persistence of the Ismaili polity is attributed to the internal cohesiveness and discipline of the Ismaili settlements so that if one particular center or fortress happened to succumb to hostile attack, its inhabitants could expect to be absorbed into any of the other remaining strongholds controlled by the Nizaris (Esmail & Nanji 1977:248).

The person who played a vital role in establishing and consolidating the Ismaili power in Alamut was Ḥasan-i-Šabbāḥ (d.1124). Ḥasan-i-Šabbāḥ was already a member of the da‘wah when he took over the fortress of Alamut in 1090. In the absence of the Imām, Ḥasan became the supreme chief occupying the rank of hujja (representative of the Imām). According to Ismaili sources, Ḥasan brought the Imām secretly to Alamut (ibid:248). Ḥasan-i-Šabbāḥ occupies a legendary figure in the annals of Ismaili history and his life history is often cited by Ismailis today to invoke a model of an ideal dā‘i personifying the qualities of dedication, sacrifice and discipline in promoting the Ismaili cause.



Emphasis and extension of certain elements in the doctrine of Imamat further invigorated the dispersed Ismaili settlements. Key elements which received emphasis were the principle of ta'lim (authoritative teaching of the Imām) and qiyāma, proclamation of the bātin given by Imām Ḥasan 'alā dhikrihi al-salām in 1164. By claiming the 'dawn of resurrection', the Imām abolished the exoteric elements of religion, containing outward acts of devotion. As the Ismailis understand it, qiyāma emphasised the inward meaning of reality, 'a purely spiritual life of inward state of the soul' (Hodgson 1968:459). The concentration on the esoteric paved the way for the convergence of Ismailism and sufism. Consequently, after the destruction of Alamut by the Mongols in 1256, Ismailism survived in Persia in the form of sufism. Corbin suggests that sufism and Ismailism became indistinguishable (1975:530).

(d) The Post-Alamut Period

Very little information is available on the history of the Ismailis for the first five centuries, following the destruction of the Ismaili polity in Persia. The tradition of the Nizari Ismailis presents an uninterrupted succession of Imāms in different parts of Persia among which Azarbayjan and Anjudan were the main centers. In 1937, Ivanow discovered, in the village of Anjudan, the tombs of Imam al-Mustansir II and Imam al-Mustansir III (1938a:52-55). Throughout this period (thirteenth to seventeenth centuries), efforts in proselytization of the Ismaili faith continued. Of special significance were the events of the fourteenth century when Ismaili dā'is (Pīrs) from Persia arrived in north-west India and won converts from the middle and lower castes. The Ismaili community in India maintained communications with the Imām in Persia. Some Ismailis undertook long journeys



overland to Persia 'in order to meet the Imām, pay him homage and receive his blessings' (Esmail & Nanji 1977:253).

In the eighteenth century, the Imāms participated in the political life of Iran. Imām Abul Ḥasan Shah and Imām Ḥasan Ali Shah occupied the governorship of the city of Kirman. The Iranian period of the Imamat came to an end when Imām Ḥasan 'Ali Shah migrated to India and settled in Bombay in 1848. This move was a result of rivalries and intrigues in the Qajar court of the Shah (Algar 1969:55-81). The headquarters of the Imām was now transferred to India.

(e) The da'wah In India

The growth of Ismailism in India was the work of the da'wah which was already under way during the Fatimid times. The efforts of the da'wah were intensified under Nizari Ismailis; one of the earliest dā'īs to have come to India from Alamut was Nur Satagur, shortly before 1166 (Hollister 1953:351). He was followed by other dā'īs among whom the most influential one was Sadr al din (d.1470). Sadr al din was instrumental in winning over the Lohana caste (Sind, Kashmir and the Punjab) to the Ismaili faith. The converts received the title of Khawaja (meaning Lord) from which the name khōjā has been derived. Pir Sadr al din was appointed the head of the khōjā community in 1430 and he introduced the first Jamā'at Khāna (place of assembly) at Kotri, Sind (Nanji 1978:74). The work of the da'wah in the Indian subcontinent continued for nearly two hundred years. The da'wah carried out by the Pīrs was embodied in devotional literature called the gināns, defined as 'contemplative or meditative knowledge.' It is interesting to note the pattern of conversion which can be identified from the gināns. Through the narratives in the



gināns, Nanji gives the following account of the activities of the dā'is (1978:55-56):

- (i) Anonymous arrival to a well-known center of religious activity.
- (ii) Performance of a miracle to draw the attention of the ruler of the place, and winning over a disciple.
- (iii) Confrontation with a local saint.
- (iv) Establishment of the dā'i's supremacy over the saint.
- (v) Consequent conversion.
- (vi) Departure.

The content of the preaching 'seized upon Hindu motifs and myths and transformed these into narratives reflecting the dawā'h's preaching' (ibid:101). Although the converts were led to a new way of life (Ismailism), their indigenous practices and conceptual framework continued to prevail. This is attested by the fact that when the Ismailis migrated to East Africa in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, they had maintained Asiatic practices.

They (the Ismailis) arrived there (East Africa) with Asiatic habits and Asiatic patterns of existence, but they encountered a society in process of development which is, if anything, Euro-African. To have retained an Asiatic outlook in matters of language, habit and clothing would have been for them a complication and in society an archaic dead weight for the Africa of the future.

(Aga Khan III 1954:30).

There were two distinct but simultaneous processes which governed the growth and development of the Ismaili community in East Africa: modernization (adaptation to a Euro-colonial form of life) and gradual but definite disassociation with the "Asiatic" mode of life accompanied by greater identification with Islam.



(f) The Modern Period⁵

It would be beyond the scope of this introductory chapter to discuss the complex process of transformation involved in a change of milieu from an Indian environment to that of the Euro-African. A brief mention of the formation of the Ismaili constitution and rituals will give us some insights into the process of transformation effected by the settlement of the Ismailis in East Africa.

The Ismailis of East Africa received their first constitution in 1905 which set into motion a 'programme of constructing a community with a highly individual and dynamic identity....' (Nanji 1974:127). As the community grew in numbers due mainly to economic growth in the interior, a new constitution was issued in 1926 which made provision for the establishment of provincial councils in accordance with the three East African territories: Kenya, Uganda and Tanganyika. Over the years, the constitution was restructured to create what eventually became a close-knit and highly organized administrative system. The purpose of the system was to meet the needs of the Ismailis in many sectors of life ranging from health, education, and finance to personal matters like marriage and inheritance. Two points established in the constitution are: '....first, that the Rules of Conduct have been conceived within the "spirit of Islam", and second that "nothing therein contained shall affect the Absolute Power and Sole Authority of Mowlana Hazar Imam to alter, amend, modify, vary, or annul at any time, or to grant dispensation from the Constitution or any part thereof"' (ibid:131).



The administrative structure of the constitution (revised in 1962) is as follows:

- (a) Provincial Councils administering local affairs organized under committees: economics, sports, women's, welfare, and youth.
- (b) Territorial Councils for Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda overseeing the Provincial Councils. One of the functions of the Councils was to deal with disputes regarding marriage, divorce and inheritance.
- (c) An Executive Council for Africa which primarily acted as a financial body channeling funds to various organizations.
- (d) Educational and health administrators for each country. Under them were appointed the provincial boards which dealt with local activities under their jurisdiction.
- (e) Mukhī and Kamaḍiyāh, religious officials whose main function was to perform and officiate all the ceremonies which took place in Jamā'āt Khāna.
- (f) Ismailia Association whose main function was to disseminate and publish literature pertaining to Ismaili traditions and values.

The constitutional affirmation of the Imām as the pivotal figure was a major factor leading to the formation of a centrally organized Ismaili community in East Africa. One of the visible expressions of the unity of the community is the Jamā'āt Khāna of which several were established in locations where Ismailis settled. Among the rituals performed in the Jamā'āt Khāna, the ceremony of ghaṭ- pāt (communal drinking of sacred water) throws into relief



the process which led to greater identification with Islam. According to Nanji, the ceremony of ghaṭ-pāt was instituted during the time when Hindus were converted into the Ismaili faith (1982:105). The ceremony included certain elements from the indigenous environment like language (Gujerati) and Hindu motifs which were synthesised with Ismaili doctrine. For example, the fourth stage in the life of a Hindu consists of joining the ashram which represents the antistructural element to the structural closure of the caste (Nanji:107). In the ceremony of ghaṭ-pāt, the drinking of the sacred water is 'the equivalent of the experience of unity, when the individual soul embraces the light, nūr of Imama' (ibid:107).

The ritual merges the individual at one level into the new community, at another it frees him from the merely structural or zāheri (literally, "exterior") aspects of ritual and enables him to experience the dimension of bāṭin, the interior religion through which his individual quest for spiritual knowledge and understanding is attained' (ibid:107).

In East Africa, the prayers (forming part of the ceremony) recited in Gujarati were changed into Arabic and greater emphasis has been placed in anchoring the ceremony within an Islamic context as instanced in the link established between this ceremony and the initiatory rites performed by Prophet Muhammed for the initial converts to Islam (ibid:106).

One of the key concepts which the Ismailis emphasise is that of purity. Classical Ismaili works consider 'ritual purity' (ṭahāra) as a pillar of faith (al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, tr.Fyzee 1974:2). In the literary sources, a state of inward purity ('purity of the heart') is considered to be essential for the attainment of spiritual enlightenment. Discussing the symbol of water in ritual, Jalālu'ddīn Rūmī states:



Next year it came sweeping proudly along. "Hey, where hast thou been?" "In the sea of the pure.

I went from here dirty; I have come (back) clean. I have received a robe of honour, I have come to the earth (again)

Hark, come unto me, O ye polluted ones, for my nature hath partaken of the nature of God.

I will accept all thy foulness: I will bestow on the demon purity like (that of) the angel.

When I become defiled, I will return thither: I will go to the Source of the source of purities.

There I will pull the filthy cloak off my head: He will give me a clean robe once more."

(tr. R.A. Nicholson 1968:VI:15).

Among Hindus, concepts of purity and pollution have caste connotations. In his account of the caste system and its implications, Louis Dumont (1974) explicates notions of purity and impurity as functions of a social order where castes differentiate themselves hierarchically from one another. In this study, I use the concepts of purity and pollution as defined and understood by the Ismailis, namely in the context of material and spiritual life.⁶

The steady growth and the social and material transformation of the Ismaili community in East Africa is attributed to the 48th Imām, Sir Sultan Muhammed Shah. The Imamat of Sultan Muhammed Shah (1885-1957) covered a period of history when the Muslim world and the third world countries were increasingly affected by western culture and technology. During this time the Imām attempted to bring about an amalgamation of Ismaili traditional values and thought with a western mode of life and organization.

The changes in the community were implemented through the firmāns (guidance given by the Imām to his followers) which affected many facets of the lives of the Ismailis, including health, education, occupation, language and family life. The firmāns were buttressed with an administrative system of councils, health clinics, welfare organizations and financial services.



Although the administrative system is geared to create a mode of organization and social life more favourable to the new environment, it continues to reflect the Ismaili tradition of service to the Imām and to the Jama'at (community). The majority of the people administering the system are voluntary workers.

Under the leadership of the present (and forty ninth) Imām, Shah Karim al-Husseini, the programmes initiated by his predecessor were consolidated, and efforts were made to meet new communal and national challenges. As traders, businessmen, and entrepreneurs, the Ismailis had contributed towards the development of East Africa. However, in the eyes of the Africans, the Ismailis and indeed other Asian groups were regarded as economically privileged, and their position in the emerging nation states became ambiguous. The Asians were faced with an issue of a homeland. Were they expected to seek a place of settlement elsewhere, or should they continue living in East Africa with an uncertain future? The general directive of the Imām to the Ismailis was that they should seek to identify their aspirations with, and become full citizens of, the state where they were domiciled. While many of the Asians left East Africa in the 1960's, the majority of the Ismailis stayed on and took up citizenship in the new independent nations.

Under a changed economic and political climate, the Imām encouraged the Ismailis, particularly the younger ones, to acquire higher education and to broaden their economic base so as to include industrial and professional fields. In order to achieve this aim, existing facilities were expanded and new ones created. Scholarship and bursary programmes have been instituted to encourage young people to pursue higher education at institutions in different parts of the world. Similarly, a network of economic and health institutions,



bringing together modern management and advanced technology, have been developed in third world countries. Under the sponsorship of The Aga Khan Foundation, these facilities operate on a non-communal basis. The Aga Khan Foundation works in close collaboration with governments and international bodies including CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency), WHO (World Health Organization) and UNICEF.

Apart from the above, some of the recent developments include:

- Institute of Ismaili studies in London, (the Institute is also affiliated with the Institute of Islamic Studies at McGill University);
- the establishment of the Aga Khan Foundation, concerned with humanitarian and cultural activities;
- the Aga Khan University and Jubilee Hospital in Karachi;
- the setting up of the Aga Khan award for Islamic Architecture;
- the constructions of Jamā'at Khānas in Vancouver and London.

In the light of the above developments, various writers have commented on the vitality and progressive spirit of the community (Anderson 1964), as the best organized and most progressive Muslim community (Hollingsworth 1960), as well as the most modernized and flexible group within the Asian population in East Africa (Fernando 1972). Ismailis have responded to modernization so as to achieve for the community standards of living, health and education which are generally among the highest in the Muslim world (Esmail & Nanji 257:1977).



(g) Ismailis In Vancouver

Prior to 1972, there were small groups of Ismaili families living in isolated centers in Canada. The Ismailis who came to Canada in the fifties were professionals who with their families had migrated from parts of Asia, Africa, Western Europe and the United Kingdom, motivated by a combination of political and economic factors and a spirit of entrepreneurship. By the sixties, small Jamā'āts had emerged and organized themselves as a community around Jamā'āt Khānas set up in leased locations. Up to about 1970 the Ismaili population of Western Canada numbered about 100 (Fernando:1979) and in North America about 600 (Nanji:1983). The Ismaili population subsequently increased as families became united and a number of Ismailis, including those from Tanzania and Kenya joined the growing community. At present, it is estimated that out of the total population of about 20,000 Ismailis in Canada, about 9,000 live in British Columbia, with the largest number located in the greater Vancouver area.

The Ismailis seem to have adapted well to the needs of the Canadian environment, and are presently occupationally diversified. One of the noticeable changes in the community is in family life, as increasing numbers of women have joined the Canadian labour force. The occupational adaptability of the Ismailis can be attributed to the leadership of the Imām, a home environment adapted to the Western industrial mode of life, and the cohesiveness of the community which is expressed in two key areas: the Jamā'āt Khāna and an administrative structure.

As in the East African case, the Jamā'āt Khāna serves as a focus of the religious, social and cultural life of the community. As local groups of



Ismailis increased in Canada, locations such as school halls served as places where members of the community could congregate for the primary purpose of offering prayers accompanied by ritual observances. At present there are thirteen Jamā'āt Khāna locations in British Columbia. Most of the Jamā'āt Khānas are open every day in the early hours of the mornings as well as evenings. Attendance varies from day to day and the largest congregation takes place on Fridays⁷ and ceremonial occasions. The early morning dhikr is the time of personal meditation and forms an important part of Ismaili religious practice.

The first permanent Jamā'āt Khāna in North America was constructed in the municipality of Burnaby. The building is designed to reflect classical and contemporary architectural styles which 'will blend harmoniously into the local environment'.⁸ Such a development symbolizes the Ismaili traditional norm which attempts to ensure continuity with religious values in relation to the existing social and cultural life.

The Ismailis commemorate several religious occasions which serve to reaffirm the ties between the Imām and the community and emphasise the idea of fraternity within the community. The most important religious occasions are:

- 'Īdd al aḡḡā (commemorating Abraham's willing response to the call of Allah to sacrifice his son);
- 'Īdd al fiṭr (marking the end of the month of fasting, Ramadan);
- 'Īdd Milad an-Nabi (the birthday of the Prophet);
- Navroz (the new year festival, March 21);
- Birthday of Hazrat Imām Ali;
- Birthday of the present Imām;
- Mehraj (the spiritual journey of the Prophet).



- Lailtul Qadr ('The Night Of Power', sura xcvi)
- Imamat Day (commemorates the present Imām's succession to the office of the Imām, July 11).

A special occasion which was celebrated (July 1982-July 1983) by the Ismaili community throughout the world was the Silver Jubilee of the present Imām's twenty five years of Imamat. During the seventy two years of the Imamat of the late Aga Khan, the community celebrated his Golden, Diamond and Platinum Jubilees respectively. Funds raised on these occasions were used to establish a wide range of programmes of social welfare and economic development in Asia and Africa. Following this tradition, during the Silver Jubilee year, existing facilities related to health, nutrition, education, and rural development were expanded and new ones created. The primary purpose of these facilities is to enhance the standard of living of the various countries, particularly the developing ones, where the Ismailis are domiciled.

One of the bodies which has been actively involved in directing the above programmes is the Aga Khan Foundation with its headquarters in Geneva with affiliations in other parts of the world. The head office of the Aga Khan Foundation Canada is in Vancouver (established in 1980). The largest project of the Aga Khan Foundation and one of the major Silver Jubilee projects is the Aga Khan Hospital and Medical College constructed in Karachi, Pakistan. The complex, which includes a school of nursing, has been given the charter of a University.

The administrative network established in East Africa has been extended to Canada in order to organize the social and cultural activities of the community. It includes the Supreme Council for Canada and regional councils for the provinces. Each of the councils has a President and a secretary and a number of members in charge of specific portfolios which include social,

realpatidar.com



educational, health, economic and cultural programmes. The administrative system as it has been established in Canada is organized as follows:

- (a) Supreme Council for Europe, Canada and the United States; provides general guidance under the direction of the Imām.
- (b) National Council for Canada makes recommendations and oversees the work of the regional councils under them.
- (c) Regional Councils for eastern and western Canada covering major urban centers of Ismaili settlements: Vancouver, Montreal, Toronto. These councils direct the activities of various subcommittees (women's, youth, health,) based on policies determined by the National Council.
- (d) Grants Council which monitors expenditures of the various organizations.
- (e) Ismailia Association organized nationally as well as regionally. Its main purpose is to disseminate religious education to Ismailis.
- (f) Mukhī and Kamaḍiyāh who officiate all the ceremonies performed in Jamā'āt Khāna; each Jamā'āt Khāna location is under these officials who are appointed for a period of two years.

Another feature of the Islamic heritage given special emphasis is architecture. The Aga Khan Awards Foundation established in 1978 awards prizes (\$500,000 every three years) for projects which demonstrate architectural excellence in terms of amalgamation of what is essentially Islamic with architectural forms appropriate to contemporary living. An integral part of the Award programme has been the convening of international seminars in different parts of the Muslim world. In addition, the Aga Khan



1985-09-19 -Ritual and Daily Life of Ismailis -Thesis (996)

realpatidar.com

29

programme for Islamic Architecture has been established with an endowment of \$11.5 million at Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to promote research and teaching in Islamic Art, Architecture and Urbanism.

The B.C. Ismaili community has participated in the Aga Khan projects by means of donations, and professional expertise. Twenty families from Vancouver have gone to Pakistan for periods of three to six years. Beyond that, the administrative and the institutional network of the community, where numerous Ismailis render voluntary services, provides a strong base for solidarity among its members. The impact of these programmes locally is to reinforce the efforts of the community in British Columbia to adapt to the host environment with reference to its religious heritage. Apart from the communal and structural forms of adaptation, however, individuals have their own subjective comprehensions of the process of change. The consequent re-definition of traditional norms and values involve an interplay between the community and the individual.

realpatidar.com



(ii) Ismaili Doctrine

One of the keys to the understanding of the Ismaili (Shi'ā) doctrine lies in the way Ismailis view man. Man is made up of body and soul participating in two worlds: the higher world of the First 'Aql, an expression of the Divine Volition, and the lower world of Nafs, which has emanated from 'Aql and is the principle of animation from which matter has originated. As man is far removed from his origins in the higher world, he needs to acquire knowledge of the latter so that he can be motivated to achieve re-union. In this task man receives help from the Imām who is the embodiment of the Divine Volition. The Imām is regarded as a being who is endowed with the wisdom requisite for infusing elements from the higher (spiritual) world into the lower world of matter. The Imām's knowledge of the spiritual realities is bestowed by Allah and is transmitted directly from one Imām to the other. The authority of the Imām occupies a central place in Shiism and obedience to him is regarded as the principal index of the believers attempt to understand the inner core of the Islamic message and the values contained in the message. Obedience to the Imām entails leading a life in accordance with his will which is expressed in the firmāns (guidance given by the Imām).

The relationship between the Imām and his followers can be elucidated through two concepts which are given central importance in Ismaili thought: the zāhir (outward) and the bāṭin (inward). Although there exists a fundamental distinction between the zāhir and the bāṭin, they are inseparable. The zāhir is the letter of the law as promulgated by the Prophet. The bāṭin represents the inner core of the faith and is contained in the zāhir. In the zāhir, the Imām is the commander of the faithful by virtue of his having been designated by the Prophet. In the bāṭin, the Imām holds the key to the source



of ta'wīl, the allegorical interpretation of the Qur'an. Through such an interpretation, the Imām enables man to return to his origins. Through the mediating role of the Imām, the juxtaposition of zāhir and bāṭin receives a link. The Ismailis believe that once the bāṭin is appreciated, the zāhir is understood as part of the bāṭin. One of the essential functions of the Imām is conceived as that of enabling his followers to go beyond the understanding of zāhir and penetrate into the inner meaning and experience of the bāṭin. In this way man can be in the zāheri world and continue to strive for the bāṭin at the same time. Based on this doctrine, the traditional Ismaili world view is to achieve both material progress and spiritual salvation.

The Nizari Ismailis developed and stressed the doctrine that the Imām is the bearer of Nūr (Divine Light). The concept of Nūr-i-Imama signifies the innermost reality of the Imām. The Ismailis maintain that Nūr is passed from one Imām to the other in direct succession; all the Imāms are therefore one in essence. In this way, the real nature of the Imām is understood as lying beyond the world of time and space. Comprehension of this reality is regarded as the highest attainable goal by the believers. The importance attached to the inward personal vision of the spiritual reality of the Imām led to the convergences of the Ismaili and Sūfī doctrines in Islam. The Imām is revered as the murshid (guide) who provides spiritual guidance to the murīd (disciple). The Ginān literature stresses the quest for mystical illumination.



The attainment of the personal vision of the Imām's spiritual reality is regarded as an important goal among Ismailis in Vancouver. They maintain that by Divine grace, such a goal can be achieved through meditation in the early hours of the morning, good deeds, and inner purification. Rituals are regarded as an important means through which inner purification can be attained.



Footnotes.

1. Paul Ricoeur in The Conflict Of Interpretations, D. Ihde ed., (Northwestern University: Evanston Press, 1977), emphasises the inner connection between these two temporalities. Interpretation enters into the time of tradition and the tradition in turn is lived only in and through the time of interpretation.
2. Kant makes a distinction between space and time; space is the form of our "outer experience," while time is the form of our "inner experience," (Ernst Cassirer 1978:49).
3. Edward Hall in his later work, The Dance Of Life (Garden City, New York: Anchor Press, 1983), expounds on informal time in relation to technical level of culture. Hall contends that informal time (which is the core culture) is 'the foundation on which interpersonal relations rest' while technical time is 'concentrated and which fragments, defines, and requires control...' (ibid:177).
4. The modern period of Ismaili history in East Africa is included in the following studies: J.N.D. Anderson, "The Ismaili Khojas Of East Africa: A New Constitution And Personal Law For The Community," Middle Eastern Studies, vol.1 (1964), pp.21-39; D.P. Ghai ed., Portrait Of A Minority: Asians In East Africa (Nairobi: Oxford Press, 1975); Azim Nanzi, "The Nizari Ismaili Muslim Community In North America: Background And Development," E.H. Waugh, B. Abu-Laban & R.B. Qureshi ed., The Muslim Community In North America, (Alberta: The University Of Alberta Press, 1983), pp.149-164.
5. Part of the material on the modern period has been included in: "The Shi'a-Ismaili Muslim Community In British Columbia," C.P. Anderson, T. Bose, J. Richardson ed., Circle Of Voices: A History Of The Religious Communities Of British Columbia, (British Columbia: Oolichan Books, 1983), pp.232-239.
6. Mary Douglas shows that concepts of purity and pollution are closely related to the structure of the social order and cosmological ideas. She argues that pollution beliefs emerge when a system of values which is expressed in a given arrangement of things has been violated. These views are expounded in Purity And Danger: An Analysis Of Concepts Of Pollution And Taboo, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966); "Pollution," International Encyclopedia Of The Social Sciences, vol.12 (1968) pp. 336-341.
7. Among all the other days of the week, the Ismailis consider Friday as auspicious; this day is associated with the presence of a large congregation, a practice which was introduced during the time of Prophet Muhammed.



8. Speech made by the present Imām on the occasion of the foundation ceremony of Burnaby Jamā'āt Khāna, 26th July 1982, Hikmat, vol.2 (1983) p.21.

A great deal of work and thought has gone into the planning and design of the building that will rise on the site. The underlying objective has been to develop a religious and social facility for the local Ismaili community, which, while blending harmoniously and discreetly with the surrounding environment and making full use of materials indigenous to the area, will still reflect an Islamic mood and add yet another dimension to the varied architecture of the Lower Mainland.



Part I Cosmology

Chapter 2

Substantive Features Of Ismaili Cosmology

Introduction

In the varied terrain of Ismaili cosmic formulations, the categories of material and spiritual are fundamental. In travelling through the terrain, the range which meets the eye covers as wide an area as speculative peaks of high mountains and 'rose gardens' of mystical thought. In spite of the number of contours defining the terrain, there is one element which appears to be constant and that is the polarity of material and spiritual life. Material and spiritual as opposite categories contain intrinsic ambiguities. The material only exists by affirming its opposite, the spiritual. The spiritual is the source of life for the material, yet in itself the spiritual is infinite and unfathomable. In this scheme, the opposed tendencies of material and spiritual are contained in man: Man is confronted with the reality of the human condition which is imperfect and temporal and the timeless and perfect structure of spiritual life. Man's temporal experience of life presents him with continual problems of reorienting and reintegrating himself in terms of an ideal form expressing man's unitary state in the atemporal.

Through a recourse to documentary materials and attitudes of lay Ismailis, this chapter gives an exposition of the Ismaili tradition where the interplay between the material and the spiritual is highlighted in different contexts:



- (a) Early Ismaili Speculation (conceptual).
- (b) Qur'anic Narrative On The Creation Of Man (dramatic).
- (c) Corpus Of The Ginānic Literature ('interiorized').
- (d) The Firmāns (atemporal/temporal).
- (e) Attitudes Of Lay Ismailis (experiencing self).

This chapter provides a setting for understanding the complementarity between material and spiritual evoked in ritual and daily life.

Early Ismaili Speculation.

Given one thousand four hundred years of Islamic history, it would be impossible to cover the gamut of thought and speculation which abound concerning man and his place in the universe. A rose plant in full bloom reflects the condition of the soil which has nourished it and beyond that, the numerous factors which have governed its growth. Similarly, a peak of speculative development can capture with intensity the reflective thought of the historical period preceding it as well as the one following it. In this category fall the writings of Ismaili thinkers who lived during the Ismaili Fatimid state (909-1171). The works of Abū Ya'qūb Al-Sijistānī, Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, Muhammad al-Nasafī and Ḥamīd al-Kirmānī encompass literary peaks during the time when Greek, Persian and the philosophical thought of the Indus-valley civilization was well known. Below, I give a summary outline of the work of Abū Ya'qūb Al-Sijistānī in so far as it reveals the paradox of material and spiritual in a literary speculative context.



(i) The Natural Order

There are two forms of creation depicted in the speculative thought of early Ismaili writers. At one level, the creation has come into being as a result of the creative will of Allah (al-ʿibdā). The verb abdā implies the radical coming-to-be of being from what is not being. Allah is al-Mubdi (the innovator) and the Mubda (the innovated) is being i.e. all being at once.

Allah innovates by a command (al-amr):

Al-ʿibdā is that aspect of creation which indicates its non-temporal, non-spatial foundation. The term al-amr says that it is God who is responsible for its happening. Things come-to-be because God is (Walker 1974:141).

By a single act of expression of Allah's Will, all forms of being originate all at once without Allah having thereafter to alter or change anything.

At the second level of creation, the principle of emanation has led to the formation of a hierarchical order where the major orders comprise al-ʿaql (the Intellect), al-Nafs (the Soul) and 'Nature'. The Intellect is pure, simple and perfect. It is defined as 'the First Innovated', 'the Preceder', 'the Quiescent'. It has no disparity, limit, qualification, motion or place. From the Intellect proceeds the Soul which is neither perfect nor imperfect. The Soul can only grasp the intellect through stages involving a progression from the lower to the higher. The Soul is called mustafid (the one seeking instruction) and the Intellect is called mufid (the instructor). As the Soul is seeking perfection, its chief characteristic is movement. Al-Sijistani identifies four parts of the soul. These are reason, holiness, growth and sense. The qualities of reason and holiness enable the soul to rise progressively to the rank of the Intellect from which it originates. At the



same time, the Soul also has close relationship with Nature as the latter has 'outpoured' from it and occupies a lower level than the Soul. The emergence of Nature is an effect of the other two qualities of the Soul, namely growth and sense. The existence of Nature is vital for the Soul in its 'journey' to the Intellect.

Nature comprises the combination of Form and Matter and is sustained by the elements of fire, air, water and earth. These elements are the source of physical (bodily) beings. The spheres¹ come into being within the physical world. Below the spheres are the kingdoms of mineral, vegetable, animal and man which form the earthly physical world.

(ii) The Normative Order

. The natural order involves a descending hierarchy beginning with Allah. It consists of Amr, the Intellect, the Soul, Nature, the spheres and finally the Kingdoms. Over and above the Natural hierarchy, Ismaili thinkers conceived of a Normative order which also originates from the Amr (command) of Allah. The Normative order comprises three dimensions: jadd, Fath and khayāl. Jadd is the grace which raises a certain 'pure soul' to a complete and intuitive grasp of how things are in the whole of the creation. The grace of jadd makes the chosen soul a 'knower'. The knowledge is acquired through the grace of Fath, the 'opening'. Through this grace the chosen soul is able to penetrate into the heart of the matter. khayāl, ('imagination'), enables the chosen soul to find a successor who will inherit these graces.

Below these three graces there are seven letters: kāf, wāw, nūn, yā, qāf, dāl and rā which form the words kūnī qadar. These are the seven divine letters "by which there gush forth psychic symbols and intellectual words from



the Two Roots". They are the "treasury of speech". By means of them, "spiritual forms" come into being just as by means of Nature bodily forms come into being (ibid:162). Part of the normative order is manifested in the form of language (based on the above letters) and this sets the stage for the role of a Prophet (the Nātiq). There are seven Nātiqs corresponding with the seven divine letters.

Each Nātiq plays a role in revealing the divine message (law) and perfecting the normative order. Once the Nātiq has established the law, the second stage of development requires the interpretation of the law. The Nātiq while he is alive can perform this task; after death, he must pass the responsibility to al-waṣī (executor). The latter is also al-asās (the founder) as he employs ta'wīl (hermeneutics) to interpret the law. However, he does not legislate. Below the Waṣī, there is the rank of the Imām. The Imām's function is to preserve the moral order as established by the Nātiq and his Waṣī.

In sum, there are two hierarchies by which the created universe is held in place: the natural order and the normative order. These two orders are distinct and interrelated. The relationship between the two is mediated by the Prophet who is inspired by the spirit of holiness. Through the grace of jadd, the Prophets acquire knowledge of the "spiritual subtleties" and "luminous delights" and bear them to creation (ibid:176). Nevertheless, the Prophet is also an historical being. Because of his mission of being the deputy of the Intellect in the Physical World, he has to account for change and for the place and the people where he will function. He is called the 'master of time' (sāhib al-zamān) and his function has to be repeated in different historical eras. Prophets who have been responsible for initiating



the historical cycles are: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammed. Among these, Muhammed is regarded as the 'seal' of the 'law' through which realities from a higher order are revealed on the earthly plane.

In the speculative thought of Ismaili writers, the doctrine on the Tawhīd (unity) of Allah, creation through Amr and kūnī qadar, the natural and the normative orders, and the cycles of the Prophets are linked to man. Man is a unique being in many respects. In the Islamic and Ismaili tradition, man is regarded as the summit of creation both in the natural as well as the normative orders. In the natural order, man provides the vital link between all forms of creation. Man contains both body as well as soul. The former is part of the ephemeral changing world of nature. Its basic requirements are similar to any other being in the natural world. Also, man's soul is part of the Universal Soul but, during its existence in the natural world, it is 'individual' and 'particular'. In this state it lives in constant tension between the world of the Intellect and that of Nature. The Soul's struggle in the physical world is described in terms of a path which is as narrow as the edge of a sword.

The schematic exposition of the two forms of creation contain the paradox of revelation and reason explained in terms of al-amr and the principle of emanation. Although the two levels heighten the mystery of creation (how can the universe come into being all-at-once and by stages at the same time?), the speculative framework seems to contain the mystery which is partially unfolded in the forms involving hierarchical orders and cyclical beginnings and ends. In the natural hierarchical order, al-Nafs (soul) by participating in the material as well as the spiritual, acts as a mediator. Nevertheless,



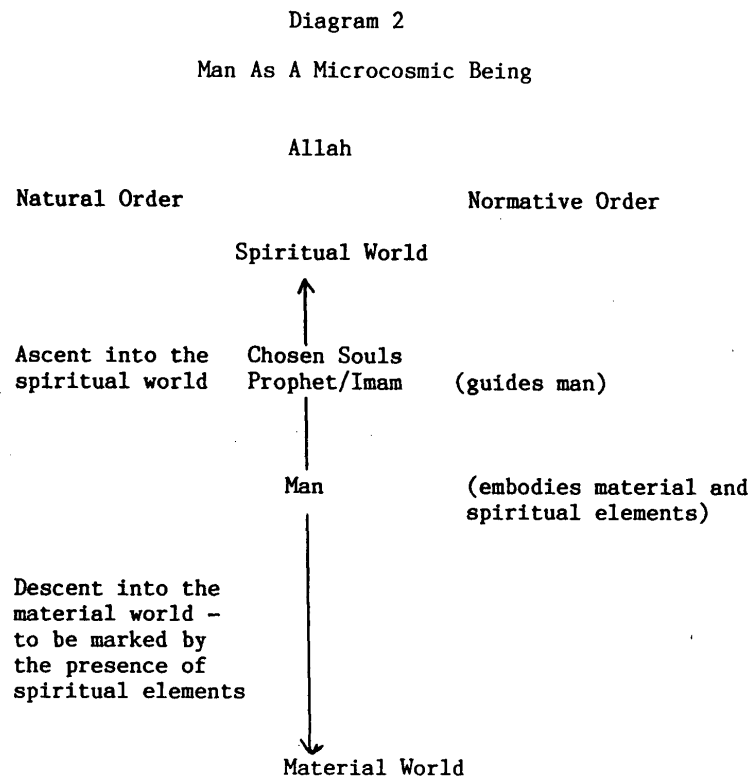
the tension and the struggle continues to exist in history as al-Nafs is pulled in two directions.

In the normative order, also conceived hierarchically, the mediators are the Prophet and the Imām who, by grasping the spiritual world 'all at once', impart partial knowledge of it in the movement of events (history) belonging to the material order. Both the natural and the normative orders exist for the sake of man who is entrusted with the task of embodying the ambiguity embedded in the two orders: natural and normative. In the natural order man is inclined in two directions, towards nature and towards the Intellect. In the normative order, man can only acquire partial knowledge. Through such an embodiment, man, as a microcosmic being, can assist all forms of creation to reach back to al-ʿaql (intellect) and unite with the amr (command) of Allah.



Diagram 1
Hierarchical Orders Formulated In The Works Of
Ismaili Writers

Allah	
<u>al-Amr</u>	
<u>Natural Order</u>	<u>Normative Order</u>
<u>Al-ʿaql</u> (Intellect) (pure & perfect; repose)	Cosmic triad of graces (<u>jadd</u> , <u>Fath</u> , <u>Khayāl</u>)
<u>Al-Nafs</u> (soul) (perfect & imperfect, repose & movement)	Seven Divine Letters (<u>kūni</u> <u>Qadar</u>)
Nature	Divine Language
Spheres	<u>Nātiq</u> , <u>Waṣī</u> , <u>Imām</u> (chosen souls)
Kingdoms	
Man	History
Animals	Physical World
Vegetation	
Minerals	





Qur'anic Narrative On The Creation Of Man

The notion of the soul having to live in the material world in order to realize its full potential is of prime importance in Ismaili cosmology. This concept receives emphasis not only in the elaborate framework of speculative thought but is also reiterated in the narratives of the Qur'an. Below I include a brief expose of the narrative on the creation of Man (s.ii:30-39).² My purpose here is to show that the narrative contains a paradox: the mediation of contraries on one plane leads to their emergence as opposites on another plane leading to a dynamic interplay between synchronic and diachronic modes.³

(i) Sequential Pattern.

Among the narratives in the Qur'an, the creation of Man as epitomized in the story of Adam covers primordial times. Preceding the creation of Man, the only beings who exist are the angels who continually praise and glorify Allah. This is a state of simplicity and relative oneness as there is no talk of an alternative course of action. When Allah reveals to the angels that He is going to create His vicegerent on earth, the angels' response is that Man 'will make mischief' and 'shed blood'. Allah declares: "I know what you know not" and reaffirms at a later stage:

.....I know the secrets of heaven
And earth, and I know what ye reveal
And what ye conceal

The set of oppositions (multiplicity) which comes into being with the creation of Man is contained and mediated by the Knowledge of Allah:



Allah's Knowledge

Angels praise	Man will shed blood
Heavens	Earth
Reveal	Conceal

Allah teaches Adam the nature of all things. Following this, Allah asks the Angels to bow to Adam. All comply except for Iblis who does not bow to Adam. Iblis's role in the mythical drama is crucial and ambiguous. At one level, he confirms the state of contraries in the form of decisive action. By his act of disobedience, Iblis is set in the opposite camp from that of the other angels. At a second and more complex level, Iblis personifies the difficulty of being able to choose from two sets of oppositions. Iblis is not able to comprehend the notion that Angels who sing the praises of Allah and therefore can only bow to Him, are now asked to bow to Adam. Interestingly, Ismaili traditional sources (Tasawwurat tr.I950:68 and Kalame Pīr tr.1935:30-31,99) consider Adam not only as the prototype of humanity but also the first Prophet of mankind. Therefore Adam combines in his being not only the contraries which constitute the nature of man but also a medium (Prophethood) through which such contraries can be mediated.

After Iblis refuses to bow to Adam, thereby acknowledging man's contrary nature, Adam and his spouse are placed in the Garden of Eden. Spatially, the Garden is a mediating point between the heavens and the earth. It contains the contraries of gender (Adam and Eve), number (bountiful and one), and categories (forbidden and permissive things).



Heavens

(up)

Garden

Adam

Eve

Permissive

Forbidden

Bountiful

One

Earth

(down)

The second turning point in the drama is reached when Adam, prompted by Iblis, approaches the forbidden tree. Exegetical literature attributes the tree to be that of wheat (Tasawwurat tr.1950:50). Wheat signifies struggle as it has to go through a series of stages involving suffering and pain before it reaches maturity. By approaching the forbidden tree, Adam acquires 'knowledge' which cannot be used in the Garden as the latter is free from toil and struggle. Adam is sent to the place, which embodies these qualities, with renewed awareness of the difficult task which faces Man. As Man 'descends' into earth, the state of multiplicity comes to sight. It is not Adam and Eve but mankind which will inhabit the earth. Here, two kinds of conditions will prevail: that of 'enmity' as well as 'unity' achieved through proximity to God. Adam repents and learns 'words of inspiration' from Allah. Absence of this act would mean that man could be 'companion of Fire' where he will experience grief and fear.



(ii) Narrative Form: Contraries – Mediation And Juxtaposition.

The narrative focuses on Man as the subject around whom all the developments merge. The main principle which shapes the events is that of contraries which are mediated as well as juxtaposed. This process is observed spatially in the mythical geographical locations of the Heavens, the Garden and the Earth. The Garden mediates between heavens and earth as it captures primordial times just after Adam was created and just before he leaves to dwell on earth. In each of these locations, the contraries are mediated as well as juxtaposed. The narrative genre begins with a dialogue pertaining to man's contrary nature. Man can be both angelic as well as diabolical. These contraries are conceptually mediated through the 'Knowledge' of Allah and are juxtaposed in Iblis. Paradoxically, Iblis's fall is attributed to his knowledge as an angel of high status as well as to his ignorance.⁴ Iblis's decision not to bow to Adam generates a second set of contraries: disobedience/obedience. Adam is placed in the Garden to resolve these contraries: bountiful things (permissible) and the forbidden tree. Adam's failure to mediate this opposition leads to his descent on earth. Here man faces the juxtaposition of either listening to the 'guidance' of Allah or drawing away from it.

The mediation and juxtaposition of contraries revolve around Man in so far as his descent on earth is related by the narrative. During each of the stages, Man moves from a state of simplicity to that of multiplicity. Initially we have the figure of Adam, while in the Garden of Eden there exists two figures, namely, Adam and Eve. On earth, the focus of the drama is on Mankind. Likewise, as the narrative progresses the figure of Iblis becomes 'transformed' into that of Satan. As Man moves to earth, he is made aware of

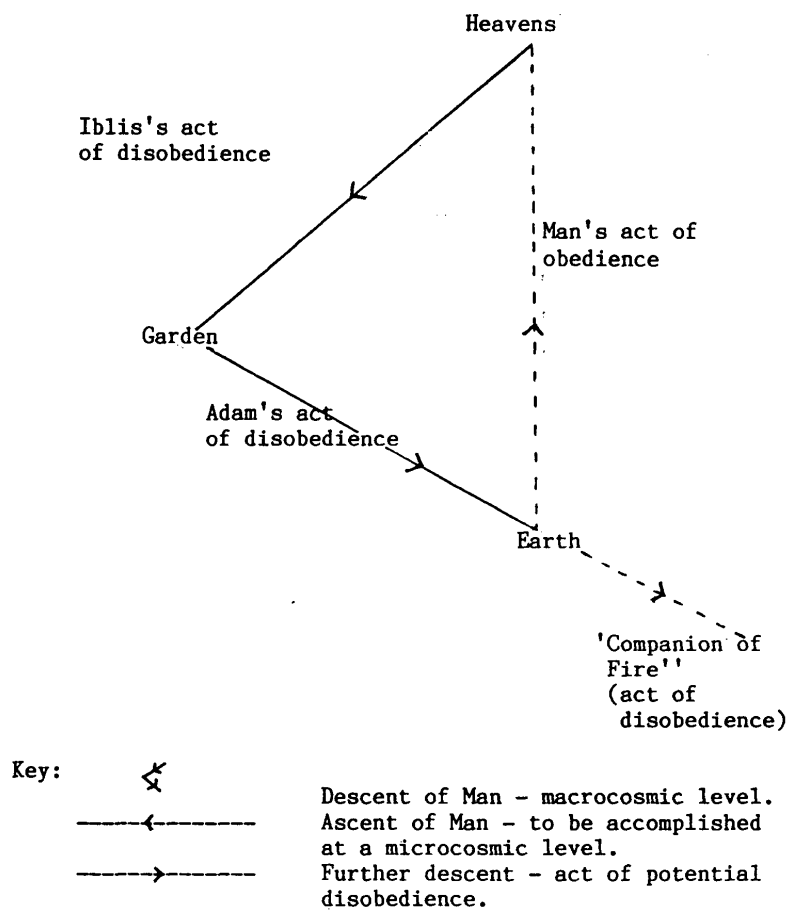


the forces pulling him in two directions. In one area, Man learns words of 'inspiration' and 'guidance' which would restore the pristine state which he enjoyed before coming to earth. On the other hand, Man is reminded that he can become the 'companion of Fire' which would bring grief and fear. The narrative ends on a note of struggle and paradox. At a synchronic level, the contraries are mediated; diachronically they are juxtaposed and remain problematic.



Diagram 3

Narrative on Creation: Man's Descent on Earth





The Corpus of Ginānic Literature.

The Ginānic literature was compiled by dā'is who were propagating the Ismaili faith in the Indo-subcontinent from the thirteenth century to the early part of the present century. The Gināns form one of the most cherished traditions of the Ismailis in Canada, and are recited congregationally during the morning and evening prayers. Among the array of themes included in the Gināns, the most pervasive and profoundly embedded is the mystical 'journey of the soul', which attempts to experience the divine in the unfathomable depths of the human self. The life of the sūfīs (mystics) is understood in terms of the development of 'ilm al-qulub, 'science of the hearts'. Knowledge and understanding in this respect are derived not from logical and rational deduction but from a sense of intuition and inner commitment of the heart. The ambiguity and sense of 'struggle' observed in the narrative on creation are given an 'interiorized' (mystical) expression in the Gināns.

In the context of this study, the mystical content of the Gināns deserves special mention as the increasing impact of modern science and technology, with its associated demand for rationalization, has affected the attitude of the Ismailis. For the older members within the community, the Gināns have provided a vital source for the comprehension and rejuvenation of the spiritual life as well as dealing with everyday occurrences. The regular recitation of the Gināns in the Jamā'at Khāna and in Ismaili homes (in the form of taped Gināns) have undoubtedly governed the thought, behaviour, and attitude of the Ismailis within the larger scheme of their cosmos. Bearing these points in mind, I give selected examples below of verses of the Gināns which are popularly known and recited by members of the community.



The journey of the soul (the quest) comprises two interlinked phases. The first one entails treading a path (tariqa) containing a series of stages. The completion of each stage necessitates the qualities of striving, perseverance, struggle and patience. The progression of the 'journey', which is described as being as difficult as treading on 'a narrow sword', becomes focused on the elements of love, longing and trust in the grace of Allah. The second phase is aptly summarized in the image of a moth who does not aspire for the light or the heat but casts itself in the flame. This phase is defined in terms of the transformation of the inner state of the adept. In other words, having achieved a 'unitive experience', the adept realizes multiplicity in a changed light.

The Ginānic expression of the above phases is couched in words, symbols, imagery, anecdotes, the usage of poetic forms (rhyme, rhythm, alliteration) and rāga (the tune). The combination of all these elements seems to have a deep effect on the participants, who say that the Gināns 'touch their hearts and inspire them in a special way'.

In a number of Gināns we learn that the soul is separated from its origins by a vast spatial expanse which is conceived in terms of a range of mountains, or a vast ocean the crossing of which would be arduous, difficult and beset with uncertainties. In one of the verses⁵, the state of the soul is compared to that of a fish whose destination is to reach a fort high up in the mountain. In another verse⁶, the pangs of the soul which strives to unite with the Divine is compared to a fish out of water. The journey begins with an expression of love, devotion, and trust in the Imām of the time, comprehended inwardly in the heart of the seeker. Expressively, through the imagery of the flower, the seeker is asked to look for the essence of the Imām



in the heart just as the scent is present in the flower. In another context the Pir (equivalent to Dā'ī) explains that just as the night is lit by the moon and the day by the sun, similarly the heart is lit by Imān (faith)⁷.

The notion that such a journey is difficult and requires a long period of waiting is spelled out in no uncertain terms. The seeker reminds her beloved (the image of female is popularly employed in the Gināns) that countless ages have gone by and the state of separation has persisted.⁸ In the familiar imagery of walking, the seeker exclaims that she has been walking for a long time and cannot continue any longer.⁹ The recognition that the difficulties faced in treading a spiritual path can lead to its abandonment is given forceful and vivid expression. In order to connote this aspect, imagery is drawn from nature: we are given to understand that man's status is like a distinguished lion but when he forgets his status then he becomes like a sheep.¹⁰ Another verse states that although the crane and the swan look alike, they are distinct: the former eats anything which comes its way while the latter seeks only pearls¹¹. One is reminded that man lives in this world for only 'four days' and that during his sojourn on earth, he becomes 'locked in a cage'.¹²

A wealth of concrete and vivid symbols attempt to express the idea of infinity and transcendence to be achieved through intense concentration. One of the Gināns which captures this dimension succinctly is the Brahm Prakash. Verses 9, 11 and 12 read as follows:¹³



Where the 'Love' flows so incessantly,
The devotee drinks of it and becomes
Love-intoxicated.

How shall I describe this 'Divine Ecstasy'!
Short of words am I to describe its Glory.

No amount of literature read or listened to,
Could help attain this experience of
happiness.

The experience of transcendence is related in verses 65 and 66:

Without the rain clouds the skies thunder
Without the palace one is enthroned.

Where the rain falls without the clouds,
There exists the soul without the material body.

Citations from the Ginānic literature have been included in order to illustrate the centrality of the categories of spiritual and material in the scheme of the Ismaili cosmos and to provide glimpses of a traditional source to which Ismailis are exposed during worship. In their conversations, Ismailis, especially elders and adults, cite verses of the Gināns in relation to existential issues as well as profane aspects of life.

The Firmāns

The relationship between material and spiritual categories is a function of history and temporal events on the one hand and the atemporal, timeless 'structure' on the other. The Firmāns reveal the interplay between the temporal events and the normative system as they attempt to accommodate both. The Firmāns have affected the course of life of many Ismailis as exemplified in the decisions which individuals and families make because 'it is the guidance given by the Imām'. An Ismaili woman recalled that when she was young, she remembered Imām Sultan Muhammed Shah's Firmān on health, where he explained that too much consumption of rice does not contribute to good



health. The woman in question decided to give up eating rice altogether. A female teacher likewise explained that were it not for the Firmāns on education, her parents would never have sent her to a University as there was no such facility in the town (Mbale) where they were living. A businessman related his conviction that he attributed his success in business to the Imāms' guidance and grace. While in East Africa, he took up an industrial line based on the directive of the Imām.

The above examples do not mean that all the firmāns are implemented at all times. Rather, some of the firmāns are used in an expedient manner. A female informant explained that her husband does not approve of her going to Jamā'āt Khāna daily. One day he told her that it is the firmān of the Imām that a woman's first priority should be her husband and the family. The woman retorted that there is also a firmān to the effect that every individual should attend Jamā'āt Khāna regularly. Nevertheless, the firmāns have had a decisive impact on the lives of the Ismailis. Beyond the 'material sphere' (temporal events), the firmāns have been a vital source of rejuvenation and cultivation of the spiritual life ('timeless structure'). Considerable emphasis is given to the latter as can be seen from the constant reference being made to 'the soul', 'the Divine Being' and 'the Life Hereafter'.

.....And in the highest realms of consciousness all who believe in Higher Being are liberated from all the clogging and hampering bonds of the subjective self in prayer, in rapt meditation upon and in the face of the glorious radiance of eternity, in which all the temporal and earthly consciousness is swallowed up and itself becomes the eternal.

(Memoirs of Aga Khan 1954:335).



..... I remind you once again that you must understand that each one of you has a soul and this soul alone is eternal; and it is the duty and responsibility of each one of you to remember that you have a soul. For this reason, it is necessary for every individual to attend Jamā'at Khāna regularly and to be regular in your Bandagi (meditation) and prayer.....

(Bombay 1967 - Precious Gems:40).

The Firmāns have continually revitalized the fundamental dimension of Ismaili cosmos. In other words, they have affirmed the presence of the spiritual order in the context of material life and have created an awareness and realization of spiritual life. Of special significance is the fact that the Firmāns are addressed to the existing circumstances and are repeatedly read in Jamā'at Khānas. The Firmāns which have been published are kept in Ismaili homes and may be referred to time and again. They occupy a unique place among Ismailis as they are made in the vein of a spiritual father (the Imām) addressing his spiritual children (his followers). This emotive content makes them specially meaningful for the Ismailis whose view of their cosmos is largely and significantly derived from them.¹⁴ Below are a few illustrative examples.

Ever since the turn of the century, Imām Sultan Muhammed Shah's increasing concern in the material world has been in the areas of health, education, economics, and an infrastructure of administration. These sectors are considered to be target areas through which developments in science and technology could be incorporated into the value system of the Ismailis.

The Imām's concern to create health-consciousness within the community is expressed in a manner which decisively includes spiritual elements. For example:



1985-09-19 -Ritual and Daily Life of Ismailis -Thesis (996)

realpatidar.com

56

Remember that according to our Ismaili Faith, the body is the temple of God for it carries the soul that receives Divine Light. So great care of body, its health and cleanliness are to guide you in late life;....but you can do much by going about your business, shopping etc. on foot and carrying yourselves STRAIGHT. The times of prayer should not be forgotten.So keep a clean soul in a clean body. Blessings.

(Nairobi 1945, 'Precious Pearls':55).

In economics and education the 'linkage' between the material and spiritual is conceived in terms of the development and sustenance of certain qualities. The following extracts illustrate this:

.....I would like you to apply the principle of brotherhood in the Jamā'at, in the way you earn your living. This means to come together, work together, as it is only by coming together, by pooling your energy and your resources that we will succeed in achieving the goals which we seek in the years ahead.

(Maliya-Hatina 1967, 'Precious Gems':80).

What then are your duties as individuals and what must you do for your own personal welfare? Education must come first. Not simply the education we receive by book learning at school when we are young. But the education which we should be receiving everyday of our existence by the very act of living. You do not have to be a learned scholar to discover, in the everyday contacts of human life, the value of such qualities as integrity, honesty, discipline and humility.

(Nairobi 1957, 'Precious Gems':11).

You should remember that education only is of no use. You must have faith and love for religion. If you are in a bus or anywhere and if you have got a taṣbīḥ (rosary) with you, say your prayers there and then. Do not depend on future or do not hesitate (sic).

(Dar-es-salaam 1957, 'Precious Gems':16).

The potential conflict which is implicitly present in an administrative infrastructure, which necessitates the formation of distinct categories of leaders and laymen, is ideally contained within the overall framework of harmony, unity, and co-operation emphasised in the firmāns:

realpatidar.com



None of you must forget that in your own areas you are in positions of responsibilities, and those who have been given responsibility must fulfill this responsibility – otherwise they are misleading themselves, they are misleading the Jamā'āt and they are misleading the Imām, and I want you to remember this. If the Imām has placed his trust and his confidence in you, fulfill that trust and that confidence, and make sure that you are serving the Jamā'āt to the best of your ability and that in so doing you are serving the Imām also.

(Bombay 1973, 'Precious Pearls':64/65).

A significant point which emerges from the firmāns cited is that material activities are directed towards wider values as instanced in the example on education. Education acquired by the individual is to find meaningful expression within the unit of the family and beyond that within the community. The firmāns provide an ideal paradigm of material and spiritual existing in mutual harmony.

Attitudes of Lay Ismailis

Conversations with Ismailis reveal that they are acutely aware of the categories of material and spiritual in life. In particular, their relation to these categories is determined by two forms of development. The first relates to mental and spiritual growth of an individual, and the second pertains to the social environment. Some examples from each of these areas follow:

Mehrunisha, a 55 year old housewife related the following:

I have always taken Nandi (food offerings) to Jamā'āt Khāna. At first, I used to take sweet and savoury dishes. Sometimes, I used to take these together while at other times, I used to alternate. Gradually, I got the inward message, that the savoury dish should be eliminated. So I just took sweet dishes to Jamā'āt Khāna. Presently, I do not take these either. I only take fresh fruits and milk.



The progression of stages from cooked and savoury to cooked and sweet dishes and further to the uncooked (raw) form, corresponds, in the mind of Mehrunisha, to a level of development from the material to the spiritual. In the category of foods, savoury items are considered to have greater affinity with material life than sweet and uncooked dishes. Mehrunisha cited the four stages of sharī'at (outward) to tarīqat (following the path) to ḥaqīqat (knowing and understanding) and marīfat (spiritual experience) as being necessary steps for the appreciation and understanding of spiritual life. At one point, Mehrunisha explained:

I was once at the stage of sharī'at. This is a difficult step and often quite painful as one does not understand why one has to do certain things. I remember, one day we had to attend the wedding of a close non-Ismaili friend in East Africa. The wedding ceremony was to be performed at Jamā'at Khāna time. We all got ready but somehow at the last minute, I felt that I ought to go to Jamā'at Khāna. It was a difficult and a painful decision as I knew that the groom would be hurt - we were very close. If I was in the same situation now, I would go to the wedding but at that time I was at a 'physical level'. I could not 'carry' the prayer in my heart.

Jivraj who is 65 years old explained the progressive stages in relation to the following anecdote.

Once there was a man whose utmost desire was to entertain the Prophet. His wish was granted and he was told that the Prophet would come to his house on a certain day. This man started making preparations and had the best food prepared for the occasion. When the day came, a beggar came by and knocked at the person's door. The latter instructed his servant to give 'yesterday's' food to the beggar. He took what was given to him and left. Meanwhile, the man waited and waited but the Prophet did not come. Eventually, the man sat in Ibādāt (meditation) and he learnt that the beggar who had come to his house was the Prophet. This man was quite advanced but on this particular occasion, he made a slip. I would consider this incident as showing the inability of a person to see the spiritual element in the material form.



When I asked Jivraj how he would describe the state of a person who is at a sharī'ati level, his response was: a sharī'ati person stands outside the gate of a sublime palace unaware of the treasures which are inside.

The second area of environmental factors can be understood in two contexts. First, there is the traditional context which provides cognitive models in such areas as ritual, the culinary system, and the life-cycle of individuals. By means of these models, environmental factors are accommodated and dealt with. Thus a man who could not for instance go to Jamā'āt Khāna (because of long hours at the shop), and therefore could not pursue an important aspect of spiritual life, could cognitively be made aware of the latter through his parents or wife's regularity in the observance of religious duties.

The second context pertains to the current environment of the Ismailis in Vancouver. As I shall show in the course of this study, the 'new' and emerging model seems to be that of the alternation of the cognitive model (a synchronic structure) with that of 'individual contexts of activity' (diachronic forms) concerning new patterns of life in the host environment. Pursuing the above example, a person who may be working in the evenings and hence unable to attend Jamā'āt Khāna would ensure that on his off days or in the mornings he does go to Jamā'āt Khāna. In this respect, a special effort would be required on his part. In other words, a greater demand is made at the individual level in achieving a stage of development which would lead to the realization of spiritual life, translated into an experience of time and space within a unitive framework.



Conclusion.

The contents of the above analysis fall under the temporality of the 'time of transmission', the other being the time of interpretation. As Ricoeur has pointed out, the two temporalities are mutually related as one interprets in order to make explicit and in the process "keep alive the tradition itself, inside which one always remains" (1974:27). The main question which arises is how do Ismailis relate to the time of transmission given the fact that during the course of their lives, they interpret their tradition and thereby renew it in relation to the continual process of change as individuals move through their life-cycles and are affected by environmental factors? I show in parts II and III that the interconnection between the two temporalities is a function of the organization of space and time in two contexts: ritual and daily life.



Footnotes:

1. The term is derived from the Arabic word aflāk translated as "luminaries of the heavenly spheres", Hans Wehr, A dictionary Of modern Written Arabic (New York: The spoken Language Services 1971), p.72.
2. The translation of the Qur'an used in the text is: Yusuf Ali, The Glorious Qur'an, (U.S.A.: American Trust Publications 1977).
3. Synchronic and diachronic are key concepts used in Lévi-Strauss's analysis of myth: "...we have reorganized our myth according to a time referent of a new nature corresponding to the prerequisite of the initial hypothesis (i.e. that myth is a unique form of story that combines the two temporal modes of synchrony and diachrony), namely, a two-dimensional time referent which is simultaneously diachronic and synchronic and which accordingly integrates the characteristics of the langue on one hand, and those of the parole on the other" (1965:87).
4. An esoteric interpretation of the narrative is given in a treatise written by an Ismaili dā'i, Husain ibn 'Ali, an account of which is given by Bernard Lewis, "An Ismaili Interpretation Of The Fall Of Adam", Bulletin Of The School Of Oriental And African Studies, 9 (1937-1939), pp.691-704. The tree is considered to be both good and bad and is interpreted at two levels: historic and cosmic. First, the tree in the good sense is the tree of knowledge which Adam has acquired and is forbidden to divulge. Iblis succeeds in obtaining from Adam the secret knowledge. In the evil sense, Iblis is the tree and Adam is forbidden to disclose to him the "secret wisdom". Secondly, on the cosmic plane, Adam represents the living Intelligence which first created the world and is known as Adam Rūḥānī, the Spiritual Adam. The good aspect of the tree which he might not approach is the rank of the First Emanation; Iblis is Adam's evil imagination and his ambition to attain equality with the First Emanation.
5. Unchāre koṭ bahū vechāna verse 1.
6. Adam āad nīrinjān verse 25.
7. Eji hetesū mīlo mārā mūnivāro verses 4 & 8 respectively.
8. Adam āad nīrinjān, verses: 2, 10, 11, 12 & 22.
9. ibid. verse 24.
10. Keshrī shihā savrūp.
11. Slokā Nāno verse 15.
12. Unch thī āayo.
13. Translation adopted from H.E. Nathoo Iīm, 1, No.2 (Oct.1975) p.21.



1985-09-19 -Ritual and Daily Life of Ismailis -Thesis (996)

realpatidar.com

62

14. Firmāns discussed below pertain to the modern period of Ismaili history. Period preceding 1957: Imām Sultan Muhammed Shah. Post 1957: Imām Shah Karim Al-Husseini.

realpatidar.com



Part II Ritual

Chapter 3

Articulation Of Enclosed Space In The Jamā'āt Khāna

Introduction

In chapter 1, we noted that the relationship between material and spiritual is spatially demarcated in terms of home (family and kin) and Jamā'āt Khāna (community) respectively. Movement from the material to the spiritual entails a change of condition from a state of activity and multiplicity to that of repose and unity. Metaphorically this movement is charted in terms of a 'journey' which, as we saw in the last chapter, is common in mystical literature. Also, in chapter 2, we gave a brief exposition of material and spiritual in various contexts: speculative thought, narrative content, metaphors and symbols (as expressed in the ḡināns and the firmāns), and personal experiences of Ismailis. This chapter attempts to do two things. First, using the metaphor of a journey, it charts the preliminary stages involved in going to Jamā'āt Khāna, highlighting the point that such a journey entails a transference from an exterior spatial form (home and the outside world) to an interior space, namely the Jamā'āt Khāna. The second part of the chapter shows that the contexts of expression of material and spiritual (as expounded in chapter 2) reach a state of 'architectonic integration'¹ through the articulation of the enclosed space in the Jamā'āt Khāna. This chapter will illustrate the point that the complementarity between material and spiritual achieved through mediation of contraries in fact facilitates the inward spatial movement, ultimately expressed in the symbol of the heart.



The Preliminary Stages

Going to Jamā'āt Khāna is effected in stages. The very first step comprises niya (intention) which symbolizes the temporary abandonment of the material world of activity and multiplicity. This notion is expressed in a number of contexts which are examined below.

(i) Ablution.

Before the participants leave for Jamā'āt Khāna, the 'ceremony' of ablution is performed by cleansing of the whole body, or face and hands. While this act entails physical action, it conveys a cognitive message to the effect that going to Jamā'āt Khāna will lead to the cleansing of the soul. The purpose of purification at this level is to gain realization of the non-temporal moment in which creation took place. This form of understanding leads to a movement from the outward (zāhir) to the inward (bātin) which forms the core of the Ismaili doctrine, and directly relates to the journey of man from the material back to the spiritual. This idea is expounded in the ritual context where body imagery (especially hands and face) receives symbolic emphasis. The Qur'anic reference to ablution (s.iv:43; s.v:7)² also highlights the importance of hands and face.



(ii) Attire.

One of the marked features of going to Jamā'at Khāna is 'dressing up' which entails the wearing of clean and best attire. Many Ismailis have two types of clothes: work clothes and Jamā'at Khāna clothes. This distinction is especially highlighted in the case of women, some of whom change from a western mode to that of an oriental dress known as the sari. The change in attire is a reflection of a significant and subtle shift in certain values. Modern western dress is a reflection of public (material) activity, greater social interaction, mobility and 'efficiency'. These qualities are implicit in the directive given by the 48th Imām, Sultan Muhammed Shah to Ismaili women in the first half of the twentieth century. The Imām urged Ismaili women to adopt western 'colonial' dress as it would enable them to play an active role in public life. By contrast, the wearing of a sari, which covers the body from head or shoulders to feet, signifies the qualities of grace/beauty, gentleness, and repose. Many women have informed me that once they put on a sari, they cannot do much physical work as it restricts mobility. While a sari signifies qualities which have affinities with spiritual life, those who do not wear saris do not necessarily lack these qualities. Many women wear western evening dresses to Jamā'at Khāna with as much grace, gentleness and repose as a sari bestows. A third type of attire worn in Jamā'at Khāna consists of a long dress covering the body from shoulders to feet, and a large piece of stitched cloth which is placed on the head. This attire is exclusively worn by elderly women and is being gradually replaced by the other two forms.

The three types of attire worn in Jamā'at Khāna reflect the following trends:



- (a) the adaptation of Ismaili women to their new environment;
- (b) the life cycle of Ismaili women;
- (c) the paradox of material and spiritual life.

The western dress donned in Jamā'āt Khāna is chosen with certain principles which continue to reflect some of the traditional values. Among Ismailis, black is a colour symbolizing the absence of spiritual life which is connoted by white and light. In spite of the availability of a large number of black evening dresses in the west, this colour, in its undiluted form, is worn sparingly. The only exception is the attire of men; significantly it is women's dress which is symbolically meaningful, as traditionally women are considered to be the repositories of spiritual life. Low necks, or short length skirts are not worn in Jamā'āt Khāna, in keeping with the tradition that women, who are expected to nourish the qualities of modesty, virtue and chastity, should expose as little of their bodies as possible. Also, trousers and one-piece evening wear common in North America do not form part of 'Jamā'āt Khāna clothes'. Mehrunisha explained:

We do not wear such clothes to Jamā'āt Khāna because they are not appropriate. After all we are in the presence of the Imām who is our spiritual father and mother.

The general idea governing the choice of the attire is to 'cover the body' which is part of material life.

It is interesting to note that the sari has been given a 'modern' look. Some Ismaili women run a number of sari stores and continually update their stock by bringing in the latest colours and designs, from India, Pakistan and Hongkong. In this respect, wearing of a sari accommodates modern trends in dressing while a western dress continues to reflect traditional elements as



they were expressed in attire. By means of their clothing, women have made an attempt to indicate how traditionalism can incorporate modern elements.

The wearing of traditional dress by elderly women images a phase of Ismaili life that will soon belong to a by-gone era. The dress of elderly women indicates that they live in a world which is separate and apart from other women (adults and young).

The life cycle of Ismaili women can be understood in three phases: youth, adult, and old age. Youth represents socialization into an adult role, and during this phase a greater amount of flexibility is exercised in the absence of a defined role. The attire worn by females at this stage is western/modern. During the stage of adulthood socially marked by marriage, saris may be worn more frequently though many females alternate these with a western mode of dressing. The change of status is significant as adult females assume the roles of wives and mothers. Elderly status among females (and also males) marks a development whereby ideally greater and more concentrated attention is given to spiritual life. Elderly women are often found praying during the day, and attempt to attend Jamā'āt Khāna more regularly as they are expected to be less committed to material life. The above points are illustrated in diagram 4:



Diagram 4

Life Cycle Of An Ismaili Woman As Depicted In The Attire.

Stage	Role	Attire
Youth	flexible	western/modern
Adult	wife & mother	western/traditional
Elderly	cognitive image of spiritual life	traditional

Before we proceed, there is a further point to dress which is relevant to our discussion: the paradox and difficulty of abandoning material life before leaving for Jamā'āt Khāna. The attire worn by men and women is a reflection of their material wealth. All men wear two piece or three piece suits in Jamā'āt Khāna, while women (apart from the expense incurred in buying clothes) put on golden jewelry or jewelry in fashion. Elderly men and women gave me to understand that it has been the expressed wish of the Imām that the attire worn in Jamā'āt Khāna should be simple and clean: simplicity and purity are attributes of the spiritual. Although clean clothes are worn in Jamā'āt Khāna, (Ismailis place a high premium on cleanliness, personal and otherwise), they cannot be classified as simple. Expensive attire worn in Jamā'āt Khāna points to the ambiguity man experiences: man's attempt to move closer to the spiritual is hampered by the fact that he cannot totally abandon the material.



(iii) Food

Another context regarding the preliminary stages in the 'journey' to Jamā'at Khāna relates to food. In their original homeland, Ismailis consumed two main meals (lunch and dinner), which by and large were taken well before Jamā'at Khāna time and soon after. Here in Vancouver, the main and perhaps the only hot meal is taken commonly around 6 p.m. As prayers commence around 7.30. p.m., most participants attend Jamā'at Khāna with 'full stomachs'. Also, on days when fasting is observed, the fast is broken at 6 p.m. – a recent innovation. In the past, fasts were only broken after the participants returned home from Jamā'at Khāna.

Going to Jamā'at khāna immediately after a meal illustrates a change governed by situational factors but, in the context of our analysis, this change translates into yet another form of material life which is not momentarily abandoned before the performance of prayers and rituals. This is specially significant because food is generally antithetical to the nourishment of spiritual life, as is well illustrated in the life of the sūfīs (mystics). Consider the following verses from So-kīriyā (one hundred ceremonies: 14-17).

Aāhar ghano karī peṭ na bhariye
jo peṭ bharshō to bhari ṭhasō
Āvaṣhe nīndrā ne bahu pastaso
Halve peṭe virā hoṣhj thāṣe.



Translation:

Never over-eat, over-filling your stomachs
If your stomachs are too full, you will become lazy
You may therefore become sleepy, and for this you will have to
repent
Through abstinence and moderation you will become active.

(adopted from W. Ivanow ed. 1948:116).

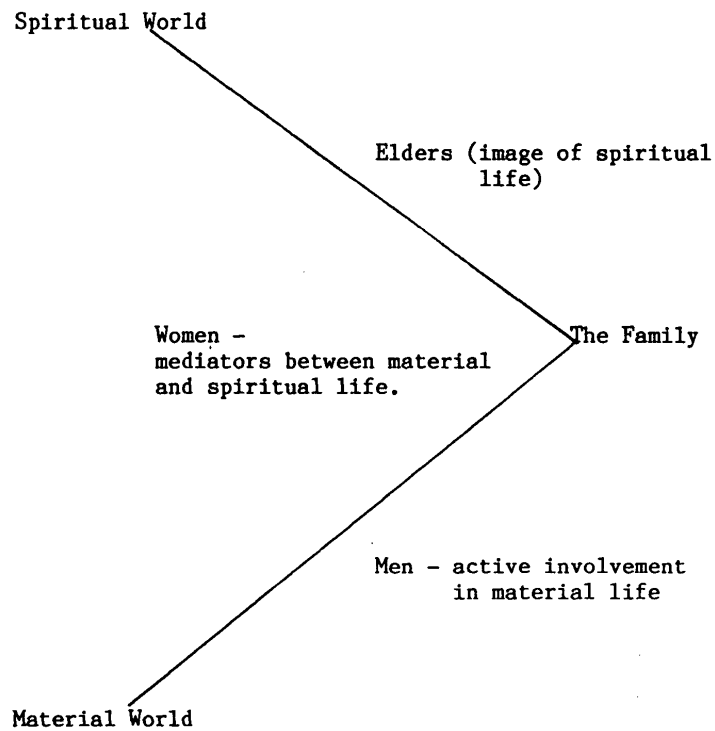
(iv) The Family

Traditionally, going to Jamā'āt Khāna was a family affair. Every member of the family contributed in creating a cognitive image of how man can live in a material world and at the same time cultivate spiritual attributes. This is revealed in the age and gender division. While men became actively and intensely involved in the material world (the public sphere), women stayed at home and attempted to act as mediators between the material and the spiritual. Beyond the gender roles, the elders imaged spiritual qualities. This model can be illustrated as follows:



Diagram 5

Cognitive Model Of Ismaili World-view As Represented By The Family.





One of the ways in which Ismaili informants described the way of life in their new homeland is in terms of autonomy and pressure of time. A male respondent explained:

There is no force here: people do what they like. In East Africa, our children would say 'yes' if we said so and 'no' if we said so. Here everybody has a choice.

The principle of autonomy has affected the pattern of attendance in Jamā'āt Khāna in two ways. First, it is no longer assumed that going to Jamā'āt Khāna is necessarily a family activity. Several times, I learnt from my informants that not all the members of the family went to Jamā'āt Khāna on every single occasion. One male informant explained:

My wife would like to go to 'khane' three hundred and sixty five days. I cannot do that; after a hard days work, I would like to stay home sometimes and 'relax'.

Interestingly, the reason for a wife being able to go to Jamā'āt Khāna on her own was that she had her own car - a concrete expression of 'independence' and mobility which females seem to be experiencing in their new homeland.

Likewise, young adults (fourteen years and over), as one mother expressed it, 'refused' to go to Jamā'āt Khāna on certain days. The reasons cited were: (a) There was too much homework. (b) They had sports practice. (c) There was a program on T.V. which they did not want to miss. (d) They were going out with friends. Although some of the reasons appear to be pragmatic, a change in attitude is noticeable. For some of the Ismailis, Jamā'āt Khāna is only associated with Fridays and ceremonial occasions.

Secondly, at the other end of the spectrum, there are a number of occasions (for some families, this would be on a daily basis), when all members of the family attend Jamā'āt Khāna together. One mother related:



Jamā'āt Khāna is keeping us together as a family. The largest number of occasions which I count when we are all together (I have two daughters and one son) is when we go to 'khane'.

In the new context, the emerging cognitive model seems to indicate that every individual in the family (youth, men, women, and elders) should individually assume the responsibility of becoming immersed in material world and at the same time develop a vision of the eternal homeland. Informants explained that because of pressure of time, it is just not possible for all the members of the family or individuals to attend Jamā'āt Khāna daily. The clash of temporalities, experienced by the fact that during Jamā'āt Khāna time there are other activities which are considered to be equally important, is also associated with the differing interests of the elders, men, women, and youth. The conceptual traditional understanding of the association of family with spiritual world is partially altered to accommodate individualistic trends from the host society. The family versus the individual as reflected in Jamā'āt khāna attendance is illustrated in tables I and II. Table I shows that there are times when individual members of the family out of their own will and intention (niyā) attend Jamā'āt Khāna in spite of the fact that other members of the family decide to stay home. Table II illustrates that there are other occasions when all the members of the family attend Jamā'āt Khāna together.



Table I

Jamā'at Khāna Attendance - Individuals.
(number of occasions when individuals attended Jama'at khana over a period of seven days).

No. of respondents = 60 (10 in each gr.)						
No. of days	Youth (20)		Adults (20)		Elders (20)	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
7	0	1	3	6	5	7
5-7	4	6	5	3	3	3
3-4	2	2	2	1	2	0
1-2	4	1	0	0	0	0

Table II

Jamā'at Khāna Attendance - Families
(number of occasions when families attended Jama'at Khana over a period of seven days)

No. of Respondent Families = 40		
No. of days	Canada	East Africa.
7	12	24
5-7	15	14
3-4	04	02
1-2	09	0

Note: Data for the above tables was collected during fieldwork.



(v) The 'Journey' Begins

The last step in the preliminary stages involved in going to Jamā'āt Khāna relates to the idea of 'treading a path'. In East Africa, a sizable number of participants used to walk to Jamā'āt Khāna. An elderly male related the following anecdote :

Once there was a blind man who went up to the Imām and requested that he should be freed from the obligation to attend Jamā'āt Khāna owing to his condition. The Imām explained that it was necessary for him (as well as for others) to go to Jamā'āt Khāna daily. The Imām recommended that the man should tie a rope from his house to Jamā'āt Khāna and by holding this rope, he should tread the path which will lead to salvation. When we go to Jamā'āt Khāna, every step which we take brings in 'Divine Graces'.

Currently, most of the Ismailis go to Jamā'āt Khāna in their cars which are material possessions, and also symbols of prestige and status. There is a direct correlation between the type of car used and the economic status of the family. Nevertheless the symbolic meaning of 'treading a path' is still maintained as one of the informants explained:

If you go to Jamā'āt Khāna with the right spirit, you acquire the benefits the moment you sit in the car.

When Jamā'āt Khāna is reached, and as the participants step out of their cars, they symbolically abandon material possessions to enter a different mode of reality. This is reflected in the image of young Ismaili volunteers who are on duty in the compound, regardless of the weather.



One of the cherished traditions of the Ismailis is that of service. Many voluntary workers occupy numerous positions in Ismaili institutions performing different kinds of services which are essentially offered to the Imām and the Jamā'āt. The volunteers in the Jamā'āt Khāna assist in organizing the ritual performances and worship. The young volunteers in the compound organize the parking of cars, carry the food offerings brought by participants, and on rainy days carry umbrellas for members of the Jamā'āt. The volunteers wear uniforms which include ties, representing traditional red and green colours. Red stands for activity and sacrifice, while green represents peace and repose. For instance among mystics there exists a correlation between the colour of the garment worn and the mystical stage attained. Thus we learn that 'he who wears green has always been an epithet for those who live on the highest possible spiritual level.....' (Schimmel 1975:102). The combination of the Ismaili traditional colours of red and green is significant as it represents a bringing together of spiritual and material life.

The symbolic colours and the activity of the volunteers provide an image of the transition from material to spiritual life as the participants enter the premises of Jamā'āt Khāna. One of the recent developments within the community is the increasing involvement of young adults in voluntary work. While on the one hand they are replacing the positions formerly held by elders, these young adults help to create an image of vitality and rejuvenation of traditional values in the modern context. This is because the younger and upcoming generation are assuming many western Canadian life-styles. They are the ones who by acquiring education in the new land, and thereby getting involved in fresh sectors of occupations, seem to be



becoming more 'Canadianized' than any other group within the community. I have often heard parents humourously commenting that:

My daughter/son is becoming a 'Canadian'.

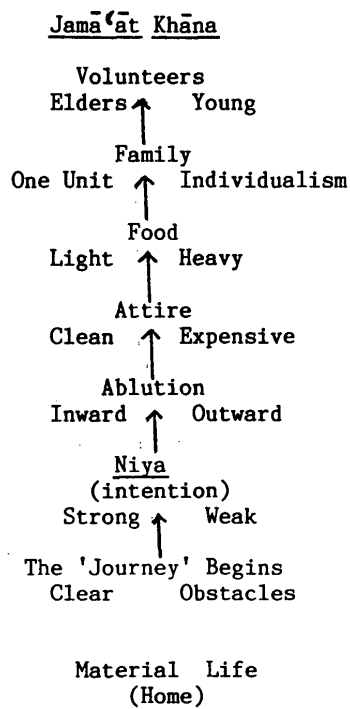
However, it should be noted that the younger members represent a way of life which is oriented towards technical sciences with its emphasis on discursive reason. This kind of reasoning is in opposition to the 'imagist thought' represented by the elders.³

This brings to an end a description of the preliminary stages leading to Jamā'at Khāna. In essence, going to Jamā'at Khāna entails, formally, a turning away from created things, illustrated in the contexts of ablution, food, attire, family and the metaphor of the journey. Our analysis indicates that the 'journey' to Jamā'at Khāna is far from simple, given its cognitive content. The strands which we have isolated above are a result of two factors. First, recognition is given to the fact that while man is in the material world, the latter will continue to present obstacles in man's ascent to his 'eternal homeland'. This idea is symbolized in the image of a duck which is a creature of both land and water. Like the duck, man is half bound to earth and half living in the ocean of God. Secondly, forces operative in the new environment both accentuate as well as mitigate the above problem, as can be explained through the example of a wife who enjoys mobility to attend Jamā'at Khāna, while the husband may decide to stay at home and watch T.V. Both the element of mobility and the range of programs available on T.V. are products of the new environment. The symbolic journey undertaken by the participants is illustrated in the following diagram.



Diagram 6

Journey to Jamā'at Khāna



Key: ↑ The 'journey' reflects the contraries associated with material and spiritual.



The Setting: Interplay Of Form And Formlessness

Once the participants are inside the premises, they remove their shoes. Shoes stand for the impurities of material life, and the feet on which they are worn signify the material component of life compared with the opposing pole – the head. The latter, especially the face, is where the outward sign of spiritual enlightenment can be observed. The Qur'anic reference to the 'Face of God' (s. vi:52 & s.xviii:28), highlights the importance of this image. The term roshni is commonly used by the Ismailis to connote the idea of light which appears on the face signifying happiness, contentment, and peace, which are attributes of spiritual life. After having abandoned one more item of material life (shoes), the participants advance towards the enclosed space which is a characteristic feature of all Islamic architecture.

Rituals and congregational prayers are held in the enclosed space in Jamā'at Khāna, which is a place for Ismailis to come together as a congregation. The establishment of the first Jamā'at Khāna, in Sind at a place called Kotra, is attributed to Pir Sadr al-Din, who lived in the beginning of fifteenth century (Nanji 1978:75). Since then, it has become a tradition among Ismailis to build Jamā'at Khānas in places where they have settled. In British Columbia there are thirteen Jamā'at Khānas in leased locations, and a permanent Jamā'at Khāna has been constructed in Burnaby.⁴ The Ismailis in Vancouver consider attending Jamā'at Khāna a form of spiritual nourishment, though they also acknowledge the attendant material gains. During fieldwork, common responses of the informants were:

I go to Jamā'at Khāna to pray but I also look forward to meeting my friends.



There are lots of benefits to be obtained in going to Jamā'āt Khāna. We get the peace of mind. Jamā'āt Khāna reminds us that we have a soul which needs to be attended. We meet other people and just being there helps us forget our troubles.

I go to Jamā'āt Khāna for peace of mind.

I go to Jamā'āt Khāna to meet my friends; if there are any other benefits, I have not discovered them as yet.

Most of the Jamā'āt Khānas are open everyday in the early hours of the mornings and in the evenings. The enclosed area in the Jamā'āt Khāna is defined and articulated by empty space and sacred objects. The interplay of these elements contribute to our understanding of how the spiritual (also referred to as the sacred in the context of the Jamā'āt Khāna) becomes manifest cognitively and within a symbolic framework. They provide the setting in which the participants may appreciate the meaning of spiritual life, if not in a manifest form then at least implicitly.

(i) Empty Space

Integral to Islamic architecture is the concept of empty space. Empty space is a symbolic representation of the presence of the Divine. The nondiscursive manifestation of the Divine is understood in terms of a non-visible centre implied in the four corners of the rectangular shape of the enclosed space. As the empty space is undifferentiated, it does not direct the eye in any specific direction. The 'centre' seems to exist everywhere as it does not have one visible spot. As the participants enter the enclosed space in the Jamā'āt Khāna, they fill up the empty space by sitting on the floor in rows. In filling up the space, each participant is considered to carry a 'centre' within himself, located in an image of the heart. It is the participants who activate the interplay between the form (filled space) and



formlessness (empty space). Further exploration of this point requires the study of some of the ritual ceremonies which take place in the Jamā'āt Khāna. Before we discuss the ceremonies, we need to direct our attention to the articulation of the enclosed space.

(ii) Articulation Of The Enclosed Space.

The most prominent item defining the enclosed space is the framed picture of the Imām which is placed in the centre of the wall facing the congregation. This picture is flanked by smaller ones which are arranged symmetrically on all the four walls. The centrality of the large picture is enhanced by additional features which may consist of lights, a garland of flowers, and curtains. These features, which are commonly used as symbols of the divine in sūfī literature, often contain the traditional Ismaili colours of green and red. The main picture serves as a central and concrete form around which the setting in the Jamā'āt Khāna is organized. In front of the picture, there is a dais on which is placed a low table (pāt), which is used by the performers of the congregational ceremonies. The central picture of the Imām provides the dividing line for the male and female sections. There are no physical markers for the two sections; instead the organizing principles of centrality and symmetry emphasise gender division as well as transcend it.

The central picture of the Imām provides the focus and a point of unity for the whole congregation and a symbol of transcendence. The symmetrical pictures of the Imām are an expression of immanent dimension: they provide two foci for the males and the females respectively. In this way the transcendent and the immanent are expressed symbolically through the organizing principles of centrality and symmetry. The significance of the transcendent as a quality



of the spiritual world, understood in a pure and abstract manner, and the immanent aspect as a manifestation of the spiritual is fundamental in Ismaili rituals.

The enclosed space is also defined by the symmetrical arrangement of several low tables, or pāts. A pāt has three main features which are constant. It is low, rectangular and white in colour. Exegetical materials on Islamic art indicate that the four corners represent the "corner pillars" (arkān) of the universe, which relate to a fifth point of reference, their foundation or centre (Burckhardt 1976:137). The center is of course implicit and 'embodied' in the empty space in the Jamā'āt Khāna. Among all the soft colours which represent the spiritual world, white stands foremost. Light (s.xxiv:35), as a symbol of the Divine Unity, is associated with white in sufi and Ismaili literary tradition. White represents purity, a concept which forms the core of Ismaili ritual tradition. The shape of the pāts implies the existence of a center, and its colour is a symbol of purity.

The arrangement of the pāts in Jamā'āt Khāna is symmetrical. Two main pāts are kept in exactly the same order on each side of the male and female sections. These pāts receive greater emphasis because behind them sit the Mukhī and Kamādiyāh (representatives of the Imām) in the male section, and their wives (Mukhyāni and Kamādiyāni) in the female section. Kamādiyāh and Kamādiyāni invariably sit on the left side of the Mukhī and Mukhyāni respectively. These positions highlight the polarities of male/female, right/left. The additional items which are placed on the two pāts perform the two functions of expressing certain polarities which relate to material and spiritual life and mediating them. As both the pāts contain identical items, for brevity's sake, I shall only refer to the Mukhī's pāt.



An expressive item on the pāt is the darbāri, food offered to the Imām. The darbāri consists of one savoury and one sweet dish, both cooked, fresh fruits and milk. That is, combinations of cooked and raw foods, solids and liquids, and sweet and savoury. The qualities of the material are represented by cooked, solid, and savoury foods, while raw, sweet, and liquid foods have closer affinities with the spiritual. The complementarity of elements in the darbāri is contained within one unit as in a 'combined state' they are placed on one pāt. It is significant to note that cooked dishes (sweet and savoury) are invariably placed near the Mukhī who is seated on the right side of the Kamadiyāh, and the uncooked dishes (fruits and milk) are kept near the latter.⁵ As cooked foods require preparation (and therefore greater material activity), we have the following association:

cooked:right: action # raw:left:repose

In Ismaili cosmology, as we have already observed, activity and multiplicity are qualities of the material world. The spiritual world is defined in terms of repose, purity and simplicity. It appears from the data considered so far that, in the ritual context, which essentially is an expression of the spiritual life, we have a representation of contraries. When these are placed in juxtaposition they symbolize elements and principles from the spiritual as well as material worlds. While the contrast is intensified at one level, it is also contained and transcended at another level. When the darbāri is placed on the pāt it is contained within one 'structure' which in itself is a harmonious whole (as we have seen, the pāt represents the four corners of the universe with an implicit central point, the essence of which is expressed in the white colour of the Divine). The principle of symmetry governs the arrangement of darbāri on the pāts of the Mukhī and the Mukhyāni.

realpatidar.com



Symmetry as a form of art lends itself to the creation of rhythm. In the Islamic context, the rhythmic quality is a 'reflection of the eternal present in the flow of time' (Burckhardt 1976:46). In this respect, the presence of the 'eternal' evokes qualities of harmony and peace, the two words which informants repeatedly used in citing reasons for attending Jamā'āt Khāna.

The pāts of Mukhī and Mukhyāni are decorated (once again symmetrically) with flowers, arranged professionally in a vase, and table clothes. Both the items contain, whenever possible, the Ismaili traditional colours of green, red and white. Green and red form the Ismaili flag, and green is categorized to stand for peace (repose) and red for sacrifice (action). Green and red are commonly combined together while white is often used in isolation. Since white stands for the essence of the Divine, green as a soft colour, standing for peace and repose, can be considered as a reflection of the spiritual qualities in a world of action and becoming, symbolized by red. In the context of our discussion, the juxtaposition of these colours provide a harmonious symbolic form through which the polarities of food in the darbāri are interconnected. Very often, red and green colours are used in the savoury and sweet dishes in the form of decoration. Some of the items which I have observed are: red and green glazed cherries, green lettuce and peppers combined with red tomatoes, radishes and peppers. All in all, the combination of traditional colours creates an ambiance of harmony and equilibrium. On ceremonial occasions, red and green colours (in the form of lights and crepe paper) are used to enhance this form of ambiance.

One or more pāts are kept on the side of the wall where the Mukhī and Mukhyāni are seated in a symmetrical order. These pāts are exclusively used for the ceremony of Ghaṭ pāt. This ceremony entails the drinking of 'holy



water' for which purpose the following are placed on the pāt: white utensils wrapped in white cloth over which is placed a white square towel, a lamp, and a container for incense. The ceremony is performed in the mornings as well as on Fridays and ceremonial occasions in the evenings. Unless a ceremony is in progress noone sits behind the pāts - though occasionally old ladies requiring wall support for their backs may sit there. The lamp is lit when the ceremony is to be performed. The ceremony (which is expounded in Chapter 5) operates at two levels: the first is an expression of 'silence' and repose noticeable when the ceremony is not performed, and the second is an expression of becoming and movement, the ceremony commencing and ending on definitive notes.

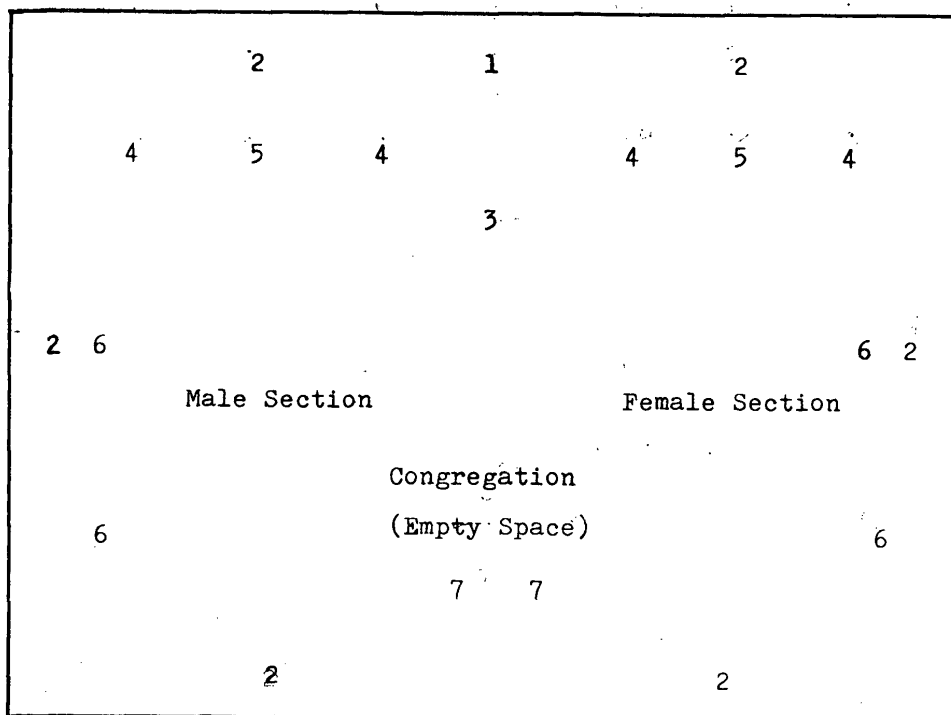


While symmetrical placement of the pāts articulates the order of space in the Jamā'āt Khāna, there is some flexibility exercised in the placement of pāts where Nandi (food offerings made to the Imām) is placed. In most of the Jamā'āt Khānas in Vancouver, the pāts are kept in the middle so as to facilitate the purchase of Nandi by men and women. After the prayers, Nandi is obtained by individuals by means of bidding. Nandi is considered to be sacred and, like all other sacred objects, it is placed on the pāts. Once Nandi has been 'purchased' by individuals, it is then placed on the floor. The significance of these sequences will be examined at a later stage. For the moment, it suffices to note that the food brought to Jamā'āt Khāna continues to reflect the contraries on one plane. The essential items brought are composed of sweet and savoury, raw and cooked, solids and liquids. Although these qualities may be found in any random collection of different foods, for Ismailis it is self-conscious, particularized and institutionalized. Nandi is brought to Jamā'āt Khāna in a well-arranged form making it both appetizing and aesthetically appealing. When placed on the pat, the food is again carefully arranged by the volunteers; it is never placed haphazardly. The pāt as a symbolic representation of the universe (as indicated by the four corners) and its center (the essence) imparts a cosmic dimension to Nandi. In this context, that is on the second plane, the contraries seem to be contained within a whole where the interrelationship of the parts brings a sense of harmony, order and tranquility. The arrangement of the pāts are illustrated in diagram 7.



Diagram 7

Articulation Of Enclosed Space In The Jamā'at Khāna



Key:

1. Central picture of the Imām.
2. Symmetrical Pictures.
3. Low Table.
4. Pāts behind which leaders take their seats.
5. Mukhī's/Mukhiyāni's pats.
6. Pāts for the ceremony of ghat-pāt.
7. Pāts where food offerings are placed.



Before we proceed, we need to discuss the special significance accorded to the 'seat' of Mukhī. The Mukhī, as representative of the Imām, officiates at all the ceremonies in the Jamā'at Khāna but the Mukhī also forms part of the congregation (the Jamā'at) and, like others, participates in all the ceremonies. In other words, he is both a leader as well as a participant. The Mukhī also provides an important focus for gender distinction as well as its transcendence. In practice, the Mukhī as a male official sits in the male section but, from that position he leads the whole congregation. The Mukhyāni who takes her place behind the main pāt in the female section, and who officiates ceremonies that require individual female participation, is not appointed in her own right. She sits behind the pāt as she happens to be the wife of the Mukhī. The only exceptions which I have observed are:

- (a) When the Mukhī is not married, another female regardless of her marital status may be appointed.
- (b) In places where there is a small Jamā'at a female may be appointed as Mukhyāni, in which case she assumes the responsibilities of a Mukhī. Nevertheless, the gender distinction is maintained.
- (c) If a Mukhī dies while still in office, his wife continues in the office until it is time for new appointments. (All Mukhīs are appointed for a period of one or two years.)

The Mukhī's role can be conceived on two planes. At one level, he assumes the role of a leader. He officiates at initiation, marriage and mortuary ceremonies. In this way a distinction between the Mukhī and the



congregation is always maintained. Gender further distinguishes the Mukhī, most commonly a male. At a second level, the Mukhī is part of the congregation. He is regarded as a member of the Jamā'āt, in which context the gender distinction is blurred at critical moments during worship.

There is a second context where the Mukhī's dual role is confirmed. Beside the pāt of the Mukhī, there are other Pāts arranged symmetrically on the right side as well as on the left side. The Mukhī invariably sits on the right side of his assistant - the Kamadiyāh, behind the same pāt. Behind the other pāts sit the leaders of the Jamā'āt. These leaders occupy their positions following a ranking order and fall under two categories. Those leaders who currently hold positions in the administrative institutions sit on the right side of the Mukhī while the past leaders who have been awarded titles sit on the left. The wives of these leaders follow suit and sit on the right and left side of the Mukhyāni respectively. A significant exception to this order is the appointment of the female leaders (which is a recent development), who occupy positions on their own right. In this case, their husbands do not receive special recognition and they sit with the congregation on the other side of the pāts. The Mukhī provides the focal point for the sitting positions of the leaders in two ways. First, the ranking order of the leaders commences from the place where the Mukhī is seated and secondly the Mukhī provides the dividing line between the past and the contemporary leaders. The Mukhī himself does not form part of the hierarchy, as can be attested by the fact that in the administrative body (the council) the Mukhī is an ex officio member. In the Jamā'āt Khāna the Mukhī provides an 'organizing point' for the seating arrangement of the leaders. He is both within the hierarchy as well as above it. The contemporary leaders sitting on



the right side represent 'action' and the leaders sitting on the left symbolize a state of 'repose', as the latter are relatively less active.

In sum, the position of the Mukhī forms a point of reference whereby the gender distinction is articulated at one level and deemphasised in the overall context of the congregation. Similarly, through the Mukhī, the hierarchy of leadership is given expression at one level and deemphasised in the ritual context as the Mukhī is not integrated in it. In providing the organizing point for the contemporary as well as the past leaders, the Mukhī in his dual role symbolically represents the two dimensions of movement and repose. The articulation of contraries and their mediation as effected through the role of the Mukhī can be illustrated as:

Mukhī

Hierarchy of leadership
Gender distinction

Right

Present

Congregation
- deemphasis of
hierarchy and gender

Left

Past

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have identified the organizing principles of centrality and symmetry through which part of the enclosed space is articulated. The empty space generates an interplay of essence and form. The essence is expressed in terms of a center which is both explicit (picture) and implicit (pāt) and the form is expressed in terms of division and multiplicity (gender, hierarchy). Architectonic integration is achieved in Jamā'at Khāna



through articulation of space which embodies meanings from the Ismaili cosmic order (interplay of essence and form), theological concepts (doctrine of Imām), and social relationships (gender and hierarchy). As the participants occupy the empty space, the integrative model is transformed to another plane: namely, that of the heart. Here the interplay of essence and form is metaphorically expressed through body imagery. This point is explored in the next chapter where I discuss three ritual ceremonies.



Footnotes:

1. This term is used by Fernandez (1982:125) to show the relationship of Fang to the spaces they occupy. Describing the centrality of village life, Fernandez shows the architectonic integration of the cosmic, migratory, economic, social, and vital personal experiences of Fang. I have used it in the text as it aptly conveys the idea of spatial integration achieved through an embodiment of meanings drawn from various contexts: cosmic, doctrinal and social.
2. According to the Qurʾān, an unwashed body is in a state of 'ceremonial impurity'.
3. Imagist thought is analogous and abounds in symbols and anecdotes. Ismaili elders are closest to this kind of thought.
4. Data analysed in this chapter is based on the articulation of the enclosed space in leased Jamāʿat Khāna locations in the greater Vancouver area. The new Burnaby Jamāʿat Khāna (completed in February 1985) will have two pictures of the Imām arranged symmetrically in the male and the female sections, just above the pāṭs of Mukhī and Mukhyāni. I gathered from community leaders that the building is based on Islamic architectural motifs (symmetry, calligraphic inscriptions) whereby too many pictures would be 'out of place'.
5. In the context of our analysis, it seems that cooked dishes representing material elements require mediation. They are placed near Mukhī's side as the Mukhī acts as a mediator.



Chapter 4

Ritual Performances: 'Structure And Communitas'.

Jamā'āt Khāna is like an ocean; it contains numerous pearls¹. As to the kind of pearls that one can acquire depends on the niyā (intention) of the believer. A lot depends on the receptivity of the heart. Everyone goes to Jamā'āt Khāna for his own jiv (soul). The latter does not benefit unless the believer's heart is pure so that the Divine Light (Nūr) can shine through it.

The above comment made by an elderly female respondent points to two modes of reality the interplay of which enables us to perceive Ismaili rituals in terms of structure and communitas. Victor Turner in his classical work on 'The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure' (1969), employs the concepts of structure and communitas in the context of 'society as a structured, differentiated and often hierarchical system' which is opposed to the communitas of the liminal period when recognition is given to a predominantly unstructured and relatively undifferentiated comitatus. In his later work (1978), co-authored with Edith Turner, Turner expounds on the qualities of communitas, consisting of simplicity, unity and the 'flow' experience whereby there is a loss of ego making the self irrelevant (1978:252-255).

In this study, I use the terms structure and communitas to elucidate a fundamental ambiguity in Ismaili tradition. Material which entails differentiation (multiplicity and form) is akin to structure while spiritual (unity and essence) is akin to communitas. The material and the spiritual are correlated. The spiritual without the material (form) would remain unmanifested; the material without the spiritual (essence) would be stasis. In other words, the Ismailis perceive their world to be dynamic through a



constant play of contraries. Everything exists by affirming its opposite and accommodating it in itself. The best example of this is provided by the metaphors of body and food as they appear in rituals. Both metaphors serve to express the ambiguous organization of contraries. The body offers both the opposition of right and left as well as the spatial opposites from head (above) to feet (below). Food constitutes the opposites of hot/cold, cooked/raw, sweet/savoury, solid/liquid, and light/heavy. In this chapter and the next, I present data illustrating the dynamic interplay of these opposites as they are expressed spatially. In this respect, *communitas* is not perceived as being distinct from structure but is realized within the structure through certain peak experiences in the ritual.

The Ceremony Of Hay-Zindā, Kayam Payā.

This ceremony is performed at the threshold of the enclosed space in the Jamā'at Khāna, ideally by each participant.² The ceremony takes a minute and entails the following: the participant bends and touches the floor by placing his right hand just inside the enclosed space. The hand is then placed over the face accompanied by the recitation of the phrase, Hay-Zindā, meaning, the Imām is present. Members of the congregation seated inside respond with the words, Kayam Payā, (the Imām is present for ever). On completion of the ceremony, the participant steps into the enclosed space.

Hay-Zindā, Kayam Payā marks a movement into the bāṭin (interior state of *communitas*) from that of the zāhir (outward state of structural life). There are two modes in the ceremony which symbolize progression into the interior state of bāṭin. These are (a) body imagery and (b) verbal exchange.



(1) Body Imagery

As the participant bends and touches the floor with the right hand, he deemphasises that part of the body which is closest to the material world, namely the feet. Significantly, there is a symbolic reversal of the mode of entrance as instead of the foot being placed first inside the enclosed space, it is the hand which precedes the foot. The placing of the hand over the face, touching the eyes and the mouth, signifies the integration of the acts of doing (hand) with those of seeing (eyes) and speaking (mouth), and also highlights the importance of the face. In the context of the 'spiritual journey', these acts signify the ascent of the soul into the spiritual world as they mark a movement from the lower part (feet) to the higher part (face) accompanied by a deemphasis of structural parts of the body (hands, eyes and mouth).

Following the Qur'anic verse:

Send not away those
Who call on their Lord
Morning and evening
Seeking His Face.

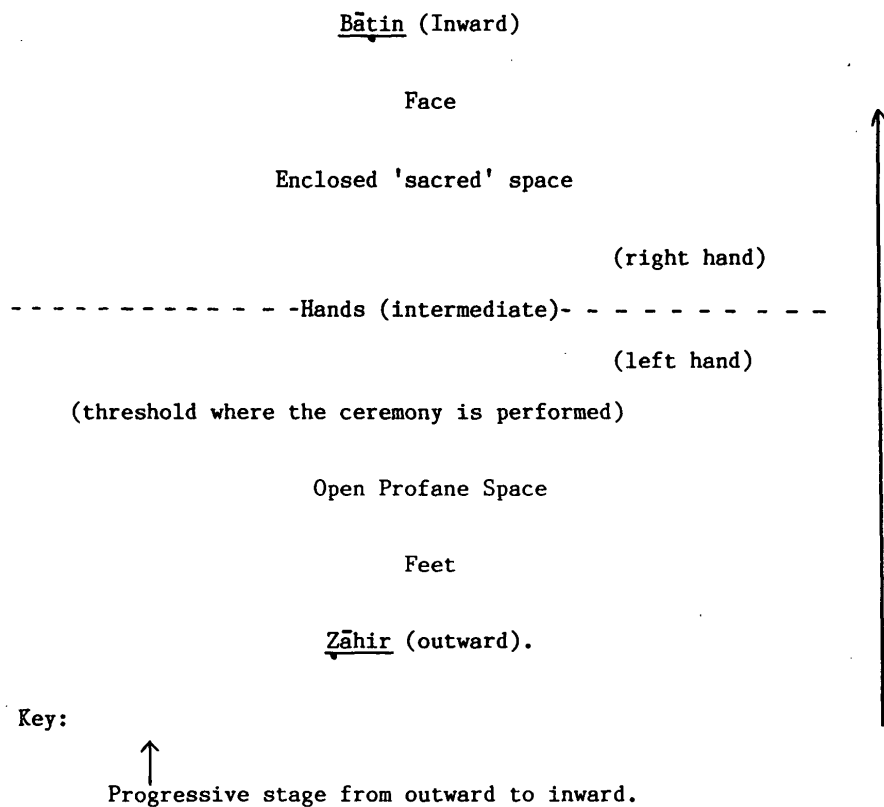
(s.vi:52)

considerable emphasis is placed on the image of face which is used 'for God's Grace or Presence, the highest aim of spiritual aspiration' (Yusuf Ali 1977:302, n.870). Body imagery in the ceremony can be diagrammed as follows:



Diagram 8

Body Imagery As Encoded In The Ceremony Of Hay-Zindā, Kayam Payā.





(ii) Verbal Exchange

Eji Hay Zindā kahetā hashtinū dān
Kayam Payā kahetā dān turi' ghji

Meaning:

The saying of Hay-Zindā will bring benefits
which are equivalent to that of an elephant
The saying of Kayam Payā will bring benefits
which are equivalent to that of a horse.

(Virani H. 1945:36)³

An elderly female informant explained that an elephant can only be useful after it is dead because of its tusks while a horse is useless if not alive. One level of interpretation which can be offered is the annihilation of the self, which forms a significant theme of Ismaili mystical thought as well as in the writings of the sūfis. 'Die before you die', is a common sūfi saying, and the mystical state of fanā fi'l-Haqq (annihilation of the self so as to achieve consciousness of God) is a common expression in Ismaili works (Kalāmī Pir 1935:xxxvi).⁴

When, therefore, a participant crosses the threshold leading into Jamā'āt Khāna, he affirms the presence of the Imām through whom is achieved consciousness of the Divine. Having taken this step, he is then received by the congregation (a homogenized entity as opposed to the mundane structure of daily life) in terms of a greater assurance that the Imām is present for ever, that is, for eternity. In this way the participant progresses cognitively from the immanent to the transcendental level (from the present to eternity). This marks a transformation of status, as each member of the congregation while in Jamā'āt Khāna is referred to as mu'min, a 'true believer' or as 'brother' and 'sister'.

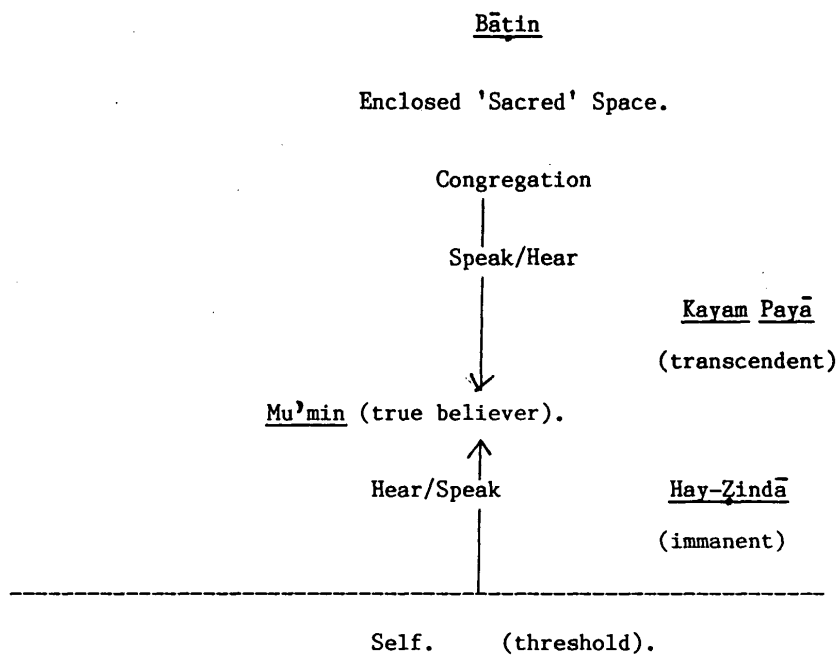


The modes of speaking and hearing which effect this transformation are important as they are reminiscent of the first revelation which Prophet Muhammed (s.a.s.) received at the age of forty. On the mount of Hira, Prophet Muhammed heard a voice asking him to 'read' or to 'recite' (iqraa s.xcvi:1-4). In the ceremony, the exchange of words (through speaking and hearing) between the participant and the congregation leads to the individual becoming part of the Jamā'āt, within which he seeks the experience of unity and also implicitly contains the mode of silence, both of which form part of communitas.⁵ Once participants step into the enclosed space of the Jamā'āt Khāna, complete silence is observed. The only voice which the participants hear is the recitation of the gināns, and it is during this time that the participant advances towards the pāt of the Mukhī in order to perform the ceremony of du'ā karawī.



Diagram 9

Transformation Of Self Effected Through Verbal Exchange





Going to Jamā'āt Khāna ideally entails preparations which image the abandonment of material concerns. As we have observed, the ceremony of Hay-Zindā, Kayam Payā is performed in an attempt to 'annihilate' the self, leading to the 'flow' experience of *communitas*. To explain this process, we focused on the body imagery where the face is highlighted⁶ and on the symbolic acceptance of the self by a wider entity - namely the Jamā'āt.

The Ceremony Of Du'ā karawī.

Once participants enter Jamā'āt Khāna, they share a mode of reality not encountered in any other context. As the participants walk toward the pāts of the Mukhī/Mukhyāni, they follow a path which is outwardly marked by carpets laid longitudinally. The significance of each step which the participant takes is explained in a firmān made in 1910 as follows:

Whoever 'walks' towards us, each step, he obtains the benefit of hundred and hundred stages.

(Virani H. 1954:36).

Having reached the pāt of the Mukhī, the participant bends and offers a token (25c to a dollar) with his right hand. The Mukhī on behalf of the Imām accepts the token with his right hand. This action is followed by the recitation of the following words by the participant who stands upright with his palms together:

I am 'sinful' (impure) from head to feet.

The Mukhī responds by saying that may his good intentions be fulfilled and all his 'sins' (impurities) be removed. Then the Mukhī prays that the participant's difficulties may be overcome, his imān (faith) strengthened, and



that he may achieve physical (zāheri) as well as spiritual (bātuni) 'vision' (deedar) of the Imām. As he prays, the Mukhī holds the right hand of the participant, while the latter looks directly in his eyes. This is a peak experience. Among all other parts of the face, 'the spiritual light' is expressed most intensely in the eyes. The contact with the Mukhī is an expression of repose (unity/communitas) achieved after a series of movements involving body imagery (multiplicity/structure).

On completion, the participant takes a seat (on the floor) beside other members of the congregation who sit facing the Mukhī.

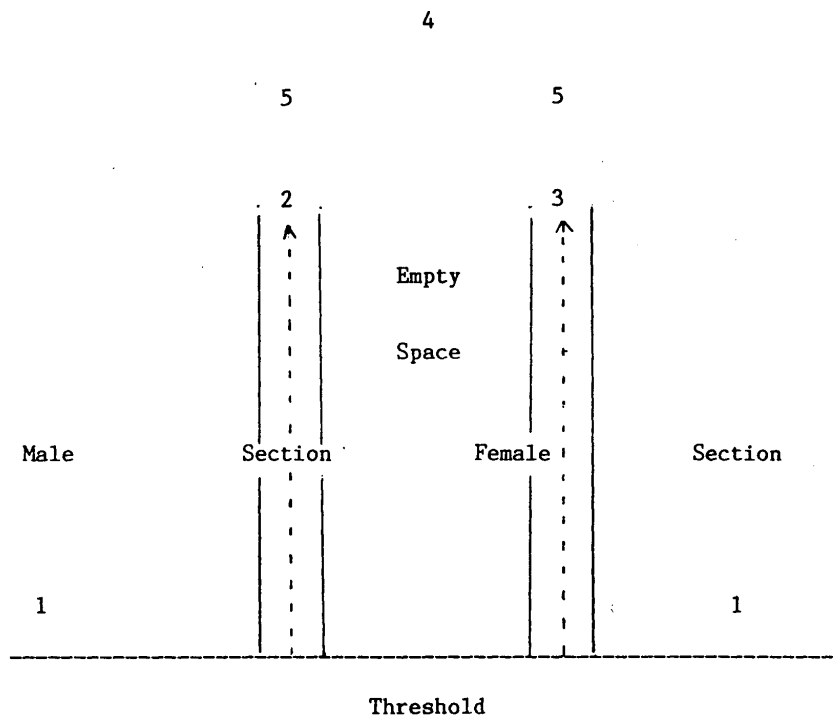
Walking towards the pāt involves the legs, followed by a pose during which the hands are activated. First, through the right hand (signifying action), a token is given. Second, the right hand is placed together with the left involving a posture of humility and supplication for the forgiveness of wrong doings. After this, when the right hand is again in movement it is united with the hand of the Mukhī - the representative of the Imām. It is during this time that the self is exposed to a wider entity (namely the spiritual world of unity) when, momentarily, a 'transcendental experience' (flow) is achieved through concentration in the eye contact. Here we have an example of another context whereby the self is symbolically merged into a larger entity through a series of stages involving movement and repose. This process is illustrated in diagrams 10 and 11.



Diagram 10

Ceremony Of Du'a karawi

No 1 - The Setting.



Key:

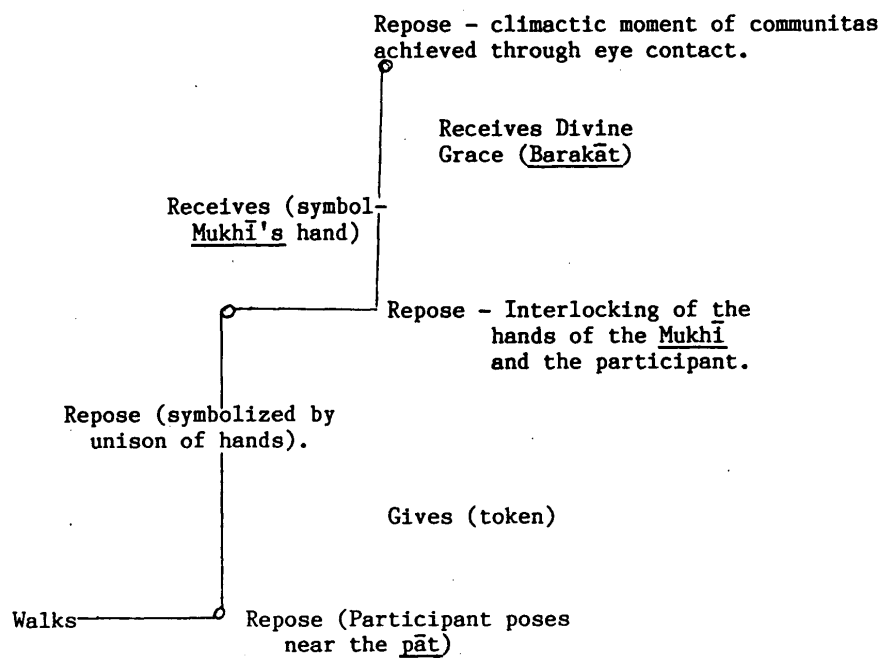
1. Entrances.
2. Mukhi's Pāt.
3. Mukhyāni's Pāt.
4. Central Picture of the Imām.
5. Symmetrical Pictures of the Imām.
- == Carpeted area where the participants walk.
- > Movement of the participant towards the pāt.



Diagram 11

Ceremony Of Du'a Karawai:

No.2.Progressive Stages Of Movement And Repose.





We have already noted the verbal communication which takes place between the participant and the Mukhi. When the participant further negates his outer self by means of the words: 'I am sinful from head to feet', he hears prayers from the Mukhi to the effect that his inner self (heart) has been purified. In Kalami Pir (a Nizari Ismaili treatise compiled in XIIth century) we learn that:

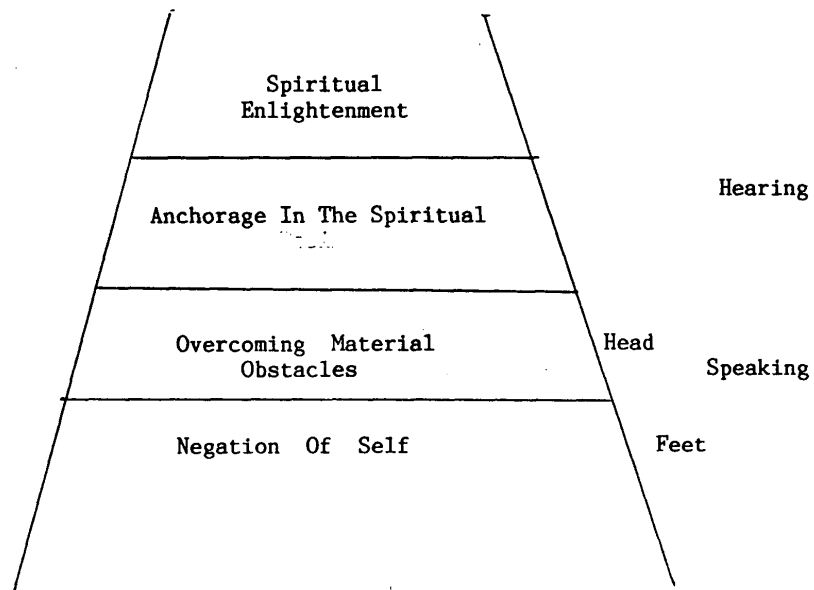
..... and the womb means ear. Just as in the womb, the material human form comes into existence, so does the spiritual form grow by the hearing of speech through the ears.

(tr. W. Ivanow 1935:31)

Through the verbal mode, the participant takes one step which affirms humility. In return he is assured, in the form of prayer, that all the obstacles in his way (the path) will be overcome, and that he will acquire a firmer anchorage in the spiritual world (through faith), and will ultimately achieve spiritual enlightenment.



Diagram 12
Verbal Communication In The Ceremony





After having 'heard' the words of purification while eye contact is maintained, the participant takes his place in the congregation occupying part of the empty space. He continues to hear the gināns, the du'ā (prayers), tashbi (prayers said while standing), and firmāns which are recited in the Jamā'āt Khāna. Oral exegesis⁷ indicate that the 'hearing' of these recitations further purify and consequently enlighten (spiritually) the heart. In the context of the ceremony of Du'ā karawī⁸, the purification of the heart is understood in terms of gunāh (sins which lead to the accumulation of impurities in the heart).

The first category of gunāh occur unintentionally owing to a person's involvement and activity in a world of multiplicity and movement. At this level, a person choses to do one thing among others and may unknowingly choose the 'wrong' course of action. An adult female informant cited the following example:

My mother in-law was quite sick one day. In spite of that, I went to work. Afterwards, I felt very guilty. I think I should have stayed at home and looked after her. I felt that I had made a mistake and the only thing I could do was to ask for forgiveness.

Consider the following example from a male elder:

We are committing several gunāhs each day. For instance, I am talking to you just now. I may say something which might hurt your feelings or I may talk about somebody else which may be defaming. I might not have meant it but it just happens because we are human beings and not angels.

All in all, man is considered to be prone to gunāh owing to his nature which is composed of two opposing categories: material and spiritual. As man is pushed into two different directions, he is bound to slip and hence remain gunegari.



Secondly, there are certain types of gunāh which man commits intentionally. These types of gunāh are committed when an individual nourishes the lower part of the soul within him. The Ismailis believe that the lower part of the soul is not only constantly present but remains active like the embers which continue to glow even if the fire has been put out.

Both types of gunāh are imaged in terms of body symbols and affective states. Hands make a person take things which do not belong to him while the legs can make one tread the 'wrong' path. The eyes, ears and the mouth can make one see, hear or say things which are illicit. These parts of the body can also be used in a positive way leading to the path of sirāṭal-mustaqīm (the right path of ascent). The highest point would be regarded by the mystic as a state where he could say:

I did not see anything without seeing God before it and after
it and with it and in it.

(Schimmel 1975:47)

Withersoever ye turn, there is the
Face of God.

(s.ii:109).

Mysticism forms an integral part of Ismaili tradition and the early morning dhikr (meditation) is directed towards achieving the state of union.

There are a number of affective states which lead to the accumulation of gunāh, namely, kām (illicit sexual desires), krodh (anger), lobh (miserly), mohe (obsession) and māyā (greed). While these states lead to the descent of the soul into the world of creation to the extent that the soul becomes clogged and veiled from its origins, there are others which lead in the opposite direction. These are classified as: sat (truth), sabūrī (patience), khamīyā (tolerance) dayā (mercy) and imān (faith).



The affective states together with the forms of action, described in terms of body imagery, have a direct relation to the heart which is regarded as 'the seat of divine presence'. Heart is referred to as dil:

Dūr me dēkḥo dilmāhe vasēḥ
jem champā phūl maḥe vaṣ'

Translation:

Do not look far, (the divine) resides in the heart
Just as the scent is contained in the flower.

In this verse, from the ginān Eji heṭe sū milō, Sayyad Imam Shah explains that the 'divine' resides in the heart just as the scent in the flower. The image of the heart as the 'seat' of the divine presence abounds in mystical poetry, the gināns, and the firmāns. The main idea which is emphasised is that, during the course of material pursuits, the heart becomes 'unclean' and veils the presence of the divine. In the ceremony of du'ā karawī, a connection between the eye and the heart is established, and the roshni (the divine light) in the heart is expressed outwardly through the eyes. The ritual, presenting a cognitive model, states that the heart is cleansed and impurities removed. The state of purity is achieved through unity, light being the symbol of unity. This form of purity is a quality of *communitas*. As Turner explains it (1978:254-255):

In flow and *communitas*, what is sought is unity, not the unity which represents a sum of fractions and is susceptible of division and subtraction, but an indivisible unity, "white," "pure," "primary," "seamless." This unity is expressed in such symbols as the basic generative and nurturant fluids semen and milk; and as running water, dawn light, and whiteness. Homogeneity is sought, instead of heterogeneity. The members of the religious community are to be regarded, at least in rite and symbol, as a simple unit, not as a sum of segments or the ultimate product of some mode of division of labor. They are impregnated by unity, as it were, and purified from divisiveness and plurality. The impure and sinful is the sundered, the divided. The pure is the integer, the indivisible.



Having explained the significance of Hay-Zindā, Kayam payā and that of Duṭā Karawī through an inward movement (imaged in terms of the face and the eyes respectively), I now move on to an exposition of the ceremony of Nandi (food offerings).



Nandi

Preparation of food is essentially a material activity, and we learn from the biographies of the sūfīs⁹ that common features of sūfī conduct were little food, little sleep, and minimum talk. The sūfīs believed that hunger was the means to achieve spiritual progress. While sufīs present the example of nourishment of spiritual life, the Ismailis attempt to maintain a balance between material and spiritual life. This point has received considerable emphasis in the firmāns:

... There are certain things which must be done in a physical sense, and there are other things which must be done in a spiritual sense, and our faith is quite clear as to what are the responsibilities, both in a physical and in a spiritual sense, on our children. There are things that you are told to do and there are things that you are not to do during your physical lifetime, and these are generally in order to improve the physical, worldly conditions of yourselves, your children and the spiritual children who will follow you afterwards. And there are things which you are told not to do because they would harm the Jamā'āt or you individually.

And this is true of your spiritual lives. In the practice of your faith there are things you are told to do, and there are things you are told not to do and at the end of your lives you must ask yourselves the question, 'Have I fulfilled during my lifetime my physical and material responsibilities as well as my spiritual responsibilities.

(Bombay 27th Nov. 1973).

The importance of active involvement in material life is best illustrated by the following story:

Shah Kirmani (a mystic) did not sleep for forty years, but eventually he was overwhelmed by sleep - and he saw God. Then he exclaimed: "O Lord, I was seeking thee in nightly vigils, but I have found thee in sleep". God answered: O Shah, you have found me by means of those nightly vigils: if you had not sought me there, you would not have found me here".

(Schimmel 1975:115 - emphasis mine).



The Ismaili culinary system is geared towards catering for social groups: family, kin, and community. Through this system, a number of qualities are cultivated and expressed, the foremost among which are those of generosity and sharing. The cultivation of these qualities assist in easing the tension of having to live in the material world and accumulate wealth and at the same time having to part with the wealth so as to reach the unitive state of spiritual life. This point is best exemplified in the practice of Nandi which is food offerings taken to Jamā'āt Khāna.

Nandi is a sanskrit word which is defined as: 'joy, satisfaction, delight; prosperity and praise of a deity at the commencement of a religious rite or observance,' (The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary 1976:541). By and large, the Nandi which is brought to Jamā'āt Khāna is prepared by women and is categorized as follows:

- (a) Darbāri (food which is placed on the pāts of Mukhī/Mukhyāni).
- (b) Sufro is especially prepared for ceremonial occasions and mortuary rites.
- (c) Memāni, food set aside from the meal prepared for the family.

Exegetical material reveals that Nandi is in essence food offered to the Imām out of love and devotion. The explanation offered by an elderly man was commonly expressed by others as well:

When we go to Jamā'āt Khāna, we are visiting the Imām's house. We should not go to the Imām's house empty-handed. Also, if we offer food to the Imām then the meal which we eat at home becomes 'clean' and the intake of 'clean' foods (khoraḥ) will lead to the birth of good thoughts. What we give to the Imām is his right as it is he who gives us roji (sustenance). I believe that if we take Nandi we get barakāt (divine grace) in return.



We also learn from a Ginān that:

Eji jo ghar hovē va^ṭst pīyāri
so nām sāhebjiḱe dijiye.

Meaning:

Whatever is best liked by you in the house
give it to the Imām.

(H. Virani 1954:51).

In the Ismaili tradition, it is through the Imām that the soul can return (ma^ṭad) to its origins. By making food offerings to the Imām, Ismailis are seeking to impart a cosmic dimension to their cooking, that is identification with the homogenous state of *communitas* and the flow experience where the self (ego) becomes irrelevant. One Ismaili woman who had occupied the position of Mukhyāni explained:

When I was preparing darbāri, I felt that I was in another world. I had a full time job, yet I did not feel strained in any way. I used to keep awake at night to cook the food and I enjoyed every minute of it. I am grateful that I was given such an opportunity. I shall always cherish those moments of satisfaction of preparing food for Jamā^ṭāt Khāna.



As Nandi is primarily cooked by women, the latter (in their roles as mediators between material and spiritual lives) assist in infusing the spiritual qualities into an otherwise material activity. As we have already noted, once Nandi is brought to Jamā'at Khāna, it is arranged neatly on the pāṭs by the volunteers prior to the commencement of the first du'a. Once it is on the pāṭ, it becomes memāni (i.e. food offered to the Imām) and, as explained by 'specialists', it is infused with sacredness through the recitation of prayers. Informants say that Nandi adds roshni (light), as without it the pāṭs would be empty. 'Roshni' is especially noticeable and emphasised on ceremonial occasions when the pāṭs are filled with food, many of which are appetizingly decorated.

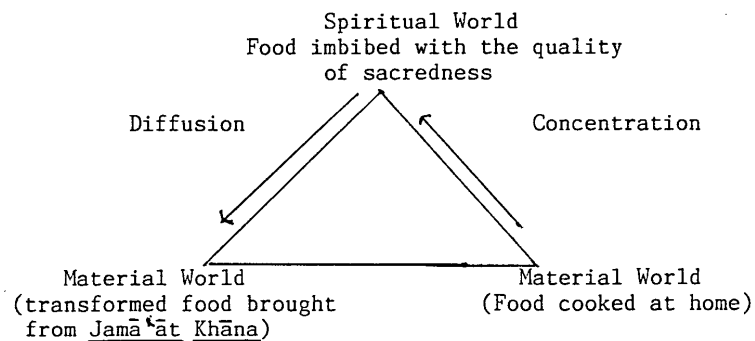
The ceremony of Nandi is performed after prayers, when the congregation disperses. At this time, it is assumed that Memāni offered to the Imām in a spiritual sense has been completed, and that food on the pāṭ has to be distributed. The method used is 'bidding'. A member of the Jamā'at who performs the ceremony takes each plate from the pāṭ and names a price. The highest bidder gets the dish. As Nandi includes a variety of foods ranging from savoury and sweet dishes to fruits and milk, a number of participants are involved in 'purchasing' a dish and taking it home. Once a participant has obtained a dish, it is never replaced on the pāṭ but is kept on the floor. This is significant as Nandi once taken from the pāṭ no longer remains part of the context in which it is infused with cosmic significance. In other words, Nandi on the pāṭ contains a greater intensity of sacredness compared with the Nandi which an individual takes home.



There is yet another context where the diffusion of sacredness is confirmed. If we maintain that social life and ritual life are two different orders of reality, then Nandi belongs to both. This is because when Nandi is brought to Jamā'āt Khāna, it is considered to be sacred. When it is taken from Jamā'āt Khāna by individuals, it becomes part of their material and social life. Here, an attempt is made to infuse the flow experience of unity into the mundane structure of everyday life. Nandi is never categorized as 'ordinary food'. It maintains its sacred character, the intensity of which varies and can be perceived in the form of 'movement'. The 'movement' of Nandi from the material world (most of the cooked Nandi is prepared in Ismaili homes) into the spiritual one of Jamā'āt Khāna and back into the material world can be illustrated as follows:

Diagram 13

"Movement" Of Nandi



The ritual ceremonies are framed events which effect transformation through peak unitive experiences of *communitas* (symbolized in body imagery of the face and the eyes) and mediation (cosmic significance given to Nandi). However, in rituals there exists a relationship between the 'given'



(objective) and the particular way in which they are rendered by the participants (subjective). In other words, the given exists as possibilities which leaves room for individual actualization. Among Ismailis, the given forms of rituals are closely linked with the status of man as it relates to life cycle processes. These processes are symbolized in the prayer postures as explained briefly below:

Prayer Postures As They Relate To Life Cycle Processes.

The prayer postures of 'upright position', 'genuflection' (half prostration), and 'complete prostration' represent man in full adoration of the Divine. This idea is expressed in a Bektashi poem 'where the forms of prayer are connected with the name of Adam, the model of humanity':

When you stand up, an alif is formed,
In bending behold: a dal is made
When you have prostrated, a mim
takes shape:
That is, I tell you, to perceive
man - Adam.

(Schimmel 1975:153)

At a second level, the prayer postures signify the life cycle of man:

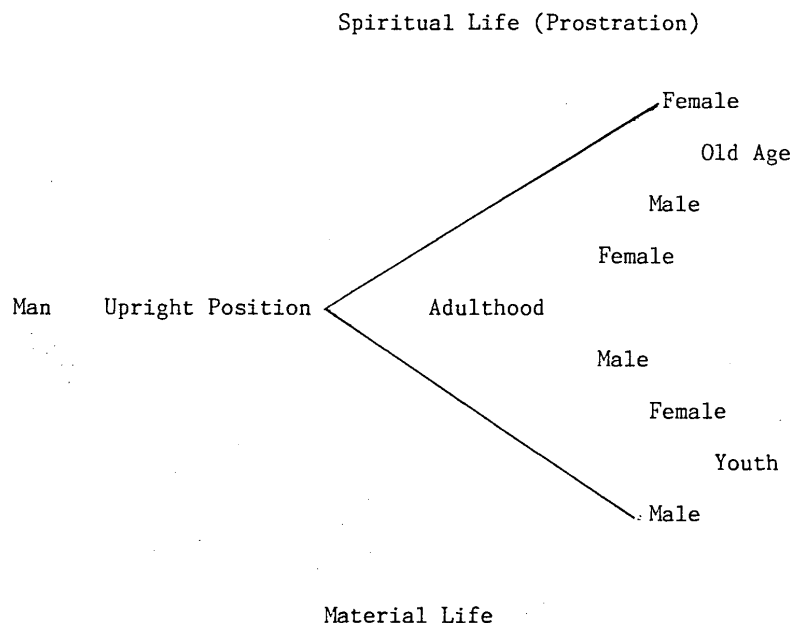
- (a) The upright posture represents the stage of adulthood.
- (b) The posture of genuflection images old age.
- (c) Prostration represents annihilation.¹⁰

The anchorage of the life cycle of an individual within a cosmic framework is illustrated in diagram 14.



Diagram 14

Cosmic Dimension - Life Cycle Of An Individual



Actualization Of The Rituals By The Participants.

The differences of opinion expressed in relation to the way in which rituals are activated, negotiated or eliminated converge around the categories of the youth, adults and the elders. As I shall show, these differences have become accentuated owing to the twin processes of migration and the impact of 'modernization'. The following table illustrates the differences pertinent to each group in so far as it relates to the informants whom I interviewed and conversed with.



Table III
Background Information On Respondents 11

Number = 30						
Age:	Elders (80-55)		Adults (54-25)		Youth (24-16)	
	M.	F.	M.	F.	M.	F.
Period of residence in Canada						
10-15	3	1	4	5	3	2
9-5	1	2	1	-	1	2
4-	1	2	-	-	1	1
Education						
University	-	-	3	3	4	3
College	-	-	2	1	1	2
High School	4	1	-	1	-	-
Elementary	1	4	-	-	-	-
Occupation						
Professional	-	-	2	1	-	-
Clerical	-	-	1	1	-	-
Manual	-	1	-	-	-	-
Business	1	-	2	1	-	-
Unemployed	1	-	-	-	-	-
Retired	3	-	-	-	-	-
Housewife	-	4	-	2	-	-
Student	-	-	-	-	5	5
Income (p.a.) (per household)						
50-70,000	-	-	1	-	-	-
40-50,000	1	-	2	1	-	1
30-40,000	1	1	2	2	1	1
20-30,000	1	1	-	1	2	1
10-20,000	2	3	-	1	2	2



Languages
(spoken)

English & Gujerati	5	1	5	5	-	1
English only	-	-	-	-	5	4
Gujerati only	-	4	-	-	-	-

Religious Attendance
P.W.

7	3	4	1	2	-	1
4-6	2	1	1	2	2	1
3-5	-	-	2	1	1	1
2-1	-	-	1	-	2	2
0	-	-	-	-	-	-



Below, I present the content of the interviews and conversations based on the categories of elders, adults and youth.

Nasirullah, an elderly male related:

Rituals bring about uncountable benefits. If a woman comes home from work at five and she decides to go to Jamā'āt Khāna, what steps will she take? She will first phone her husband and will tell him to come home early. After that, she will quickly prepare a meal, bathe the children and keep them 'ready'. All these actions are counted as being spiritual. Sometimes satan comes in the way; while preparations are made for Jamā'āt Khāna, a friend may phone and say that she is coming over. This would be a test. If the woman is firm in her faith, she will tell her to come some other time. If such an incident occurs and the temptation is overcome, then double benefits are incurred.

The first obstacle is over and we sit in the car and leave for Jamā'āt Khāna. The travelling we do at this time is 'counted' as part of bhāṇḍgi (prayer). When I go for the ceremony of du'ā karawī, I pray for everybody when I am walking towards the pāt. I am sure, I benefit when others pray. All the ceremonies which we perform purify our minds and hearts. They enable us to acquire ḥaqīqatī samā'ī (spiritual understanding) and barakāt (divine grace).

Shirin an elderly female informant explained:

Going to Jamā'āt Khāna is a matter of dil (heart). Some people understand, others do not. Undoubtedly, we all benefit from the prayers of the Jamā'āt but it is a matter of degree. Some people get more sawāb (benefits), others less. We are human beings. We are gunegari, we make mistakes all the time. Sometimes you hurt other people's feelings, other times you may have taken something which is not yours. So when we go to Jamā'āt Khāna and perform all the ceremonies, we are eliminating ma'āl ('dirt') from inside our dil. Every ceremony which we perform has a purifying effect provided we have faith (imān). Imān can move mountains. We do not have to understand everything we do. If we have imān and love and devotion for the Imām, that is sufficient. Imān is something that cannot be acquired overnight. It is a gradual process. Take the example of my grandson who is only sixteen. When his mother asks him to accompany her to Jamā'āt Khāna, he resists. I said that is not the way to do it. You have to inculcate this habit into him and this is a long process and requires not only time but patience and perseverance. I think that if he is told everyday that going to Jamā'āt Khāna is important,



1985-09-19 -Ritual and Daily Life of Ismailis -Thesis (996)

realpatidar.com

120

then one day he will attend and once he tastes the 'nectar',
he himself will drag his mother to Jamā'āt Khāna .

Jamā'āt Khāna is like a 'treasure house'. There are numerous
kinds of diamonds and pearls there. How much we can acquire
depends on the state of our mind. Do you understand what I am
trying to say? If we let go the Jamā'āt Khāna, there will be
nothing but darkness in our minds and hearts.

realpatidar.com



The above conversations are representative of the views held by elders. They all adhered to the view that ritual performances are important and are 'steps which one has to mount in order to reach one's destination'. The concepts around which the significance of ritual is explained are: faith, love, devotion, patience and perseverance. The emphasis is not so much on logical explanations but on acceptance and receptivity based entirely on faith. The explanations offered revolve around images like those of 'nectar' and 'treasure house'. Conversations with elders reveal that they attempt to comprehend the world and acquire basic insights to life by means of anecdotes, images, symbols and intuition which are linked to the elements of faith and patience. For example, Dolatbai, a widow with one son, related that it was very painful for her when her son moved out of the house after marriage in order to set up his own residence. 'I prayed and in my heart I knew that I would not be separated from my son.' After two years of 'waiting', Dolatbai's wish was granted when her son decided to live in the townhouse close to hers.

Extracts Of Conversations With Adults:

Female Informants:

Sultana:

Since I was twelve years old, I was inclined towards religion. At that time, I was following all the practices blindly. I used to do whatever I was taught. I never understood anything. As I grew older, it dawned on me that there was a purpose behind going to Jama'at Khana and all the ceremonies which are performed there. Once I remember my mother was very sick. I went to Khane and prayed. Somehow or the other, my mother recovered and I acquired more faith.

When I came to Canada, I realized to a greater extent the importance of religious life. In this respect, ritual ceremonies do make our hearts pure and through this we can get 'spiritual experience'.



Mumtaz

I go to Jamā'at Khāna for peace of mind. I just find it relaxing to be there. I do not think that rituals are very important. Sometimes I wonder, why do we have to have all these ceremonies? Why do we have to 'dress up' when we go to khāne? I think that religion is personal. I do not perform the ceremony of Hay zindā (ceremony performed just before entering Jamā'at Khāna) because I feel shy.

Male Informants:

Muhammed:

There is a symbolic meaning attached to the ritual. It is our tradition. At first, all that I was taught was 'words' and 'movements'. Gradually, I began to understand that these words and movements point to the presence of the Noor (Light) in the Jamā'at Khāna. We need constant reminder of this point and rituals help us to remember. I feel refreshed and spiritually uplifted when I attend Jamā'at Khāna. I think rituals do not really purify us literally. They affect us psychologically. If I feel that I am psychologically purified then I would make extra efforts to remain 'pure' in my material life. For instance, once in a while I feel like staying home from work. If I phone in sick, I get paid for the day; but I never do that though my friends say: 'everybody phones in sick regardless....'

Nazir:

Having been exposed to the western world, I feel that there is an absence of a sense of belonging. There is havoc and no common denominators. All these shortcomings are reversed in Jamā'at Khāna. There is a very special kind of bond that ties us with the Imām and through him with the Jamā'at. A sense of well-being is a vital part of life, and I think that this is acquired through faith. By faith, I do not mean blind belief; at one time, I never appreciated our ceremonies. But as I grow older, I realize that there is deep significance attached to the ceremonies. I wanted to learn to appreciate them myself rather than being told what to do.

Even the scientists admit that there is a system within ourselves. This system is different from other systems like respiratory, blood circulation and so on. This system can be identified with faith and du'ā (prayer). It is this system which leads to one's well-being. The place of ritual within this system is that it enhances religious life.

When we are depressed or unhappy, we can seek remedy by asking Hazar Imām to help us. Whether we actually get help or not is secondary but knowing that he is there and the community is around relieves our minds of worries. Once the mind is free of worries then we have



greater freedom to think and arrive at a solution. Through ritual the bonds between community members become strong and it is the community who offers solace and support at all times. Even if we are not in difficulties, as human beings we need to interact. We cannot live otherwise.

The content of conversations held with adults reveal that there are two modes through which Ismailis (given their present milieu) are attempting to comprehend and interpret their rituals. The first one is the traditional mode which is based on the concept of faith. An adult male informant explained:

My parents 'taught' me that prayers form the pillar of our faith and that the ritual ceremonies purify our hearts. I accepted all of this without questioning but my children do not accept this - they require explanations. They ask a number of questions. How can I answer them ? Where do I get explanations from - I was never explained anything.

As we have observed in the case of the elders, 'teaching' by faith did not entail verbal instructions. Faith required practice and the inculcation of qualities of regularity, perseverance, tolerance and patience. The image which portrays this point vividly is that of the planting of the seed. The element of faith does not necessitate an emphasis on details regarding the nature of the soil, weather conditions, the availability of water and so on. Instead, concentration is directed towards images of flowers that would bloom, the sweetness of the fruit, the greenness of the leaves and the strength of the roots.

While nurturing into adulthood traditionally occurred largely through faith, as explicated above, the adults are increasingly emphasising a second mode for 'understanding' ritual behaviour. This mode recognizes the importance of elements of explanation, 'meaning' and significance. The point which needs to be stressed is that the 'explanatory' mode appears to be a product of modernization and the emerging centrality of 'scientific and logical thinking', not withstanding the fact that both science and religion



have a defined status in traditional Ismaili thought. New ideas expressed in relation to ritual is that the latter is 'psychologically' purifying, 'going to Jamā'āt Khāna is relaxing', 'it gives me peace of mind' and that the 'well-being of a person is important'. The climax of this mode of thinking was expressed by one mother who said:

Tell the elders that the only form of relaxing is not acquired in Jamā'āt Khāna. There are other forms of relaxation like walking and going to the movies.

Obviously, Jamā'āt Khāna in the above citation is equated with the idea of relaxation which is directly linked with the present form of life-style where work and leisure are distinctly separated.

The younger members within the community seemed to display an open-minded attitude towards the subject of ritual. While they did not embrace the ceremonies firmly like the elders, they did not discard them either. Rather, they felt that it was time that the significances of the ceremonies were explained to them.

Conversations recorded represented the following range of views from male and female youngsters:

Male Informants:

Yes I believe that rituals have some significance but I would like to know what the significance is. I do not understand why we perform the ceremonies.

I do not think that rituals make much difference; may be for some people it matters a lot. I would prefer only to pray and meditate.

I do not know much about rituals. I guess they are important.



Rituals make me feel 'pure'. I do not think that I can explain further. I am sure there is a lot of importance to the ceremonies. I hope one day somebody will explain them to me.

Female Informants:

The only thing I can tell you about rituals is what I have learnt from my mother and mission class teachers. I guess rituals help as they purify us internally.

I would like to know more about rituals before I can answer your questions.

I think rituals have some significance; I have not thought about it. I guess it keeps us together as a community. Rituals form part of going to Khane which gives me peace of mind. At least, temporarily I forget all my worries. Yah, I think they are important.

I cannot imagine going to Khane if there are no ceremonies. I know there is a lot of importance to the ceremonies. It would be wonderful, if someone gave us the meanings attached to everything we do in Khane.

The emphasis of the younger members within the community appears to be on understanding. One youth summed it up as:

Explain them to us first. If it makes sense to us then we will follow them. We do not want to do things and then later discover that they do not hold much water.

From the above, we can postulate that the way in which the elders and the youth 'put their worlds together' are diametrically opposed. The image of a mountain can exemplify this point further. While the elders climbed every step before they discovered the nature of the landscape at each level, the youth while climbing the same mountain seek for a prior description of the landscape in so far as the scenery can be put in 'a sequel of descriptions'. In this framework, the adults act as mediators being exposed to two different worlds.



Before we conclude, I shall make brief reference to some of the noticeable changes which have emerged in the enactment of rituals by participants. It is important to note that these changes are not of a structural nature and do not alter the cognitive model developed above. Rather, the changes have emerged from the reaction of the participants in relation to pragmatic necessity as well as differing understanding of the tradition of rituals.

The cognitive importance of the ceremony of Hay-zindā, Kayam payā is affirmed at an ideal level. Yet, in actual practice it is not performed by all the participants. Some participants have condensed it to the extent that before entering the enclosed space, the right hand is placed over the face leaving out the verbal mode of exchange. Likewise, for the ceremony of Duʿā Karawī, some of the steps are eliminated, like bringing the palms together. The responses from the participants included the following range :

First, a large number of the participants felt that the ceremonies were not performed 'properly' because people fail to realize the significance and meaning attached to the 'words', the gestures and the symbols. The 'quest' for meaning is a recent development and is related to the 'modern' attitude of wanting to understand and know the meaning prior to the performance. Traditionally, 'knowledge' and the meaning were the outcome of action.

A second type of response was directed to the idea that it is a matter of inward conviction. What matters in this context is the belief in the heart. In other words, outward movements are not considered to be crucial.

Thirdly, a change of attitude towards religion was attributed as a factor which led to a lack of enthusiasm for the ceremonies. One respondent



explained that: 'people in the modern world are less religious and hence without religion there cannot be a place for rituals.'

Interestingly, among the ritual ceremonies, that of Nandi has generated a certain amount of controversy. As observed earlier, the Nandi comprises, to a large extent, traditional dishes. Especially when sufro and darbāri dishes are prepared, extra efforts are made to 'rejuvenate' traditional cooking which employs large amounts of butter, oil, molasses and sugar. As these items are categorized as 'problematic' for health, there are some people who feel that such foods should not be brought to Jamā'at Khāna. The reason given is that such Nandi is bound to end up in the house of an Ismaili where it would be consumed and in the long run cause problems of health. On the other hand one man expressed it:

Nobody is compelled to buy Nandi. If there is a problem of health in the family, then such Nandi should not be bought.

It is important to note that 'criticism' is not levelled at Nandi as such but at the level where Nandi is taken back into the material context of life.

Conclusion.

The discussion of the three ritual ceremonies has revealed a cognitive structure which entails a movement from the outward, material world of zāhir (structure) into the inward spiritual world of bāṭin (communitas). While rituals activate symbolically the interplay between form (the manifest) and essence (the hidden), it also points to the dimension whereby such a structure is actualized by the participants. As we have observed, the participants do not follow the cognitive model in its absolute form but adapt to it in terms of situational factors as well as 'individual' understanding. In this respect communitas provides a vital link between ritual and everyday life of the



Ismailis. The symbolic points through which *communitas* (that is unity, simplicity, purity, and the flow experience) is expressed are the face, eyes and heart and 'cosmic space of the pāt'. The experience of *communitas* continue to provide a framework for the organization of the daily lives of the Ismailis. As I shall show, the cognitive models in daily life (culinary practice and life cycles) reflect the presence of the spiritual in an otherwise material context.

In the case of the Ismailis in Vancouver, the model which seems to be emerging (this model may depict a transitional phase) is that of diametrical opposition between the youth and the elders, where the adults remain in the position of mediators, and between home and working lives of women. In order to elucidate this process further, we need to look at the everyday life of the Ismailis. In the latter context, the movement observable is from the inward spiritual world of bātin into the outward world of zāhir. Before we expound on this point further, we need to look at one more ceremony where the theme developed in this chapter is illuminated further. In the following chapter, I present the ceremony of ghat-pāt.



Footnotes.

1. The image of the 'pearl' is especially revealing as it is used in sufi and ginānic literature to describe the 'journey of the soul'. The soul separated from the ocean goes into the cloud and returns to its home changed into a jewel.
2. Both males and females participate in the ceremony. Male gender is used for the purpose of brevity.
3. H. Virani, The Philosophy Of Our Religious Ceremonies, [Gujerati], (Bombay: Ismailia Association For Bharat, 1954).
4. W. Ivanow, tr. Kalami Pir: A Treatise On Ismaili Doctrine, (Bombay: A.A.A. Fyzee Esq., 1935).
5. This point receives considerable emphasis as children are taught from an early age to be quiet in Jamā'at Khāna.
6. The importance of body imagery in ritual has been elucidated in the works of V. Turner, The Forest Of Symbols (New York: Cornell University Press, 1967); M. Douglas, Natural Symbols (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1973). Concerning the metaphor of the human body, Turner explains: 'This use of an aspect of human physiology as a model for social, cosmic, and religious ideas and processes is a variant of a widely distributed initiation theme: that the human body is the microcosm of the universe' (ibid:107). Douglas explicates the notion of two bodies: the social and the physical contending that the relationship between the two provides a source for the creation of symbols (ibid: 93-112).
7. Oral and verbal exegesis referred to in the text has been obtained from specialists (Al Waezeens) who have studied Ismaili doctrine.
8. There are two other forms of du'ā karawī ceremony which are performed in the same manner. These are conducted for the deceased and during times of difficulties.
9. For instance, consider the following verses written by Jalālu'ddīn Rūmī, one of the greatest mystics of Islam:

You must needs have a weeping eye, like the little child:
do not eat the bread (of worldliness), for that bread
takes away your water (spiritual excellence)

Give a loan, diminish this food of your body, that there
may appear the face (vision) of (that which) eye hath not
seen.

(R. A. Nicholson, ed. & tr. The Mathnawī Of Jalālu'ddīn Rūmī, 6 [London: Luzac & Co. Ltd, 1968]), p.11.



1985-09-19 -Ritual and Daily Life of Ismailis -Thesis (996)

realpatidar.com

130

10. This schema is adopted from Bedil, a mystic who wrote in the late seventeenth century (A. Schimmel 1975:153).
11. Informants included the three groups: elders, adults and youth. Data used in the table is from my field notes.

realpatidar.com



Chapter 5

The Ritual Performance Of Ghaṭ-pāt: Formation And Activation Of A Cognitive Model.

The ritual ceremony of ghaṭ-pāt encapsulates the core of the Ismaili tradition. We have established so far that the Ismaili tradition is informed by two major but opposing categories of material and spiritual. The relationship between the material (defined in terms of form, multiplicity and activity) and the spiritual (understood in terms of essence, unity and repose) is ambiguous involving a dynamic play of opposites. We explored this theme in relation to articulation of space at different levels: Jamā'āt Khāna, body imagery, and food.

In the following pages, I present data giving a detailed description and analysis of the ceremony of ghaṭ-pāt at three levels: first, the ceremony reveals the structural¹ model which shows how the Ismaili tradition is articulated spatially within a symbolic framework. The second level explicates an interplay between the structural form of the ceremony and its activation by the participants. Here, it emerges that such an activation culminates in the inward 'spatial' journey expressed in the image of the heart. Lastly, I cover differences in attitudes showing how the participants use ritual to express the vicissitudes of social life as they experience it in their daily life. The differences in attitudes reveal that the participants experience two forms of space and time: the traditional, symbolically expressed in the ceremonies, and the emergent arising from their new environment.



The Formation Of The Cognitive Model

(i) The Setting:

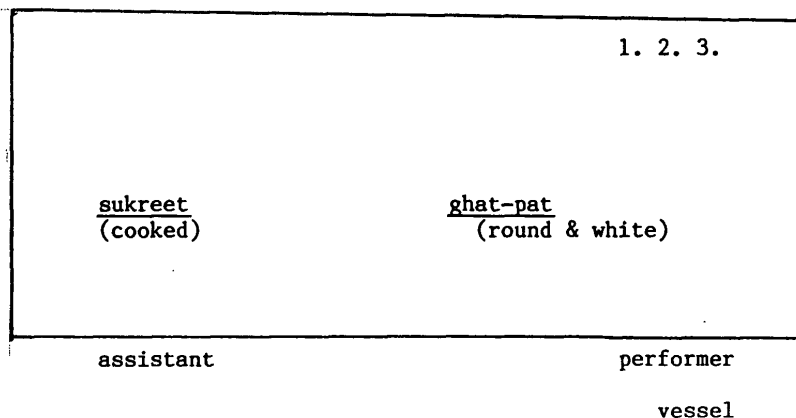
Ghāt-pāt is a Sanskrit word compounded from ghat, meaning vessel used for water, and pata, which is a low rectangular table. Functionally, 'ghat-pāt' refers to a set of vessels used in the ceremony. The vessels, consisting of three round plates, one round bowl, eight mini-bowls, and one jug, are wrapped in a white square cloth diagonally tied with two knots and covered with a white towel. The set (i.e. 'ghat-pāt') is placed on the right side of the pāt beside which is kept a lamp, a container for incense, and a bottle containing niyaz (holy water). On the left side is placed sukreet which is a cooked dish (refer to diagram 15). The ceremony can be performed by any member of the congregation who has acquired competence in reciting the du'ā (congregational prayer) and in following the various steps through which the ceremony is 'unfolded'. The ceremony is performed in the Jamā'āt Khāna in the early hours of the morning and on Fridays and special occasions in the evenings. The ceremony is also referred to as ab-i shafā which is a Persian term.



Diagram 15

The Setting

pat - rectangular in shape and white in colour.



Key:

1. Lamp.
2. Incense.
3. Bottle filled with niyaz.

(ii) Primordial Symbols.

The three symbols of white, light and water form the core of the cognitive model. Among Ismailis, white indicates the liminal. The illuminating studies of Van Gennep (1909) and Victor Turner (1962, 1969) have shown the importance of the liminal phase during a period of transition from one status to another. As this is a marginal status, this is the time of 'symbolic enrichment' when members of a cultural tradition draw upon sources



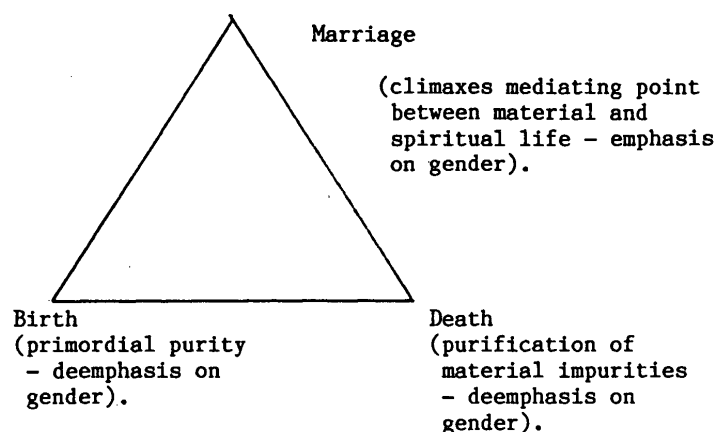
of rejuvenation. Among Ismailis, it is revealing to note the shifts of meaning attributed to white in the context of life cycles.

White is specifically used as an attire during the initiation ceremony of newly-born children, marriage (white is only worn by women) and death. A newly-born child signifies the state of primordial purity as this stage entails minimal contact with the material world. The white cloth (unstitched) covering a corpse symbolizes a last attempt marking a series of ceremonial stages to 'purify' the soul of the deceased. The white dress of a bride and the white worn by women on other occasions provide a symbolic juncture for achieving spiritual rejuvenation. Through the symbol of white, women's role as mediators between the material and the spiritual receives further emphasis. The shift of meaning from birth to marriage and then to death relates to the two planes of unity (an attribute of spiritual life) and multiplicity (an attribute of material life). Birth marks an entry into material life, death marks an exit from material life, while marriage signifies a climactic point of deeper involvement in material life (expressed in terms of family and kin ties). This point is illustrated in Diagram 16.



Diagram 16

Symbol Of White Encoded In The Life Cycle Of Individuals.



White is a spiritual colour as it is associated with the qualities of purity and simplicity. In the context of the life cycle, it is used progressively, marking the three stages of birth, marriage and death. In the ceremony of ghat-pāt, white remains constant and is the all-pervasive colour. This is because the vessels used, the cloth, the towel and the pāt are all white. By contrast, the two symbols of water and light are used more actively and progressively marking a number of stages.

Light is switched on at the commencement of the ceremony and switched off when the ceremony comes to an end. Oral exegesis² has revealed that in the past dipak, (lamp) lit with purified butter and not electricity, was used for the ceremony. The fact that an electric table-lamp is used in all Jamā'āt Khānas reveals in an interesting manner the usage of technology, with its implicit basis of rationality and logic, in the ritual context. The use of a man-made item as opposed to a relatively natural form (like that of dipak)



paradoxically conceals the revelation of natural powers which in the ritual are primordial powers. Nevertheless, the lamp, though a modern product, is not used for utilitarian reasons on the pāt.

All Jamā'at Khānas are well-lit, and the 'light' on the ghat-pāt is only lit when the ceremony is to be performed, and switched off as soon as the ceremony is over. In other words, light marks the symbolic release of generative powers, an irruption of the spiritual on the plane of manifestation. The elderly members of the community informed me that when the light is switched on, the rūhani (the souls of the deceased) and the angels join the ceremony. These beings depart when the light is switched off. Their presence thus evoked sunders the boundaries which otherwise contain the everyday experiences of Ismailis. In their conversations, Ismailis attribute light (Nūr) as a quality of the divine, and this Nūr, they say is present in the Imām.

In the ceremony, water is a symbol through which the generative powers of the spiritual also referred to as sacred can be observed 'from the beginning to the end'. Initially, the water is placed on the floor signifying a primordial state. Through a number of ritual stages, the water is transformed into ab-i shafā. As the water is kept in a vessel on the floor, its ritual origins are beyond the structure of the pāt. Water is given 'form' when it is poured in the kumbh (bowl). Exegetical material reveals that at this stage, the water presents a microcosmic image of man. The image presented is that of the kumbh as a body and the water as soul. This is exemplified as follows:



Ya shah kumbhe bhāṇḍhiyo jā'ī raḥe
jā'ī vinā kumbh ne hōye
tame gināne bāṇḍhiyo manḥ rāhe
gur vinā ginān ne hōye.

(ghat-pāt ni du'ā 1953:8)

Translation:

The soul is contained by the body
Yet without the soul, the body cannot exist
Similarly, the mind is 'enlightened' by knowledge
Without the Imām, there cannot be knowledge.

In the above verse, the relationship between the body and the soul is defined mutually. The soul is given 'form' by the body which contains it while the body is given life by the soul. Beyond this, the mind (manḥ) is 'held in place' through wisdom which is imparted by the gur (meaning Imām). The above verse encapsulates the Ismaili cosmic order. Man's unique status, containing the contraries of the body and the soul is given expression within a symbolic framework. At another level the idea which is emphasised is that of the acquisition of wisdom. In this context, the concept of purity is taken beyond the idea of cleansing. In an Ismaili treatise compiled in the thirteen century (Kalami Pir ed. and tr. by W. Ivanow 1935:90), the symbol of water is expounded as follows:

Ablution means the returning to the knowledge of the Imām, because water in the system (hādd) of ta'wil symbolizes the knowledge of the real truth (ḥaḳīqat).

While in the kumbh, water is transformed into ab-i shafā through congregational prayers and the addition of holy water (niyāz) from the bottle. Ab-i shafā is ritually poured into mini-bowls from the kumbh for consumption by the participants. Verbal exegesis³ maintains that the ab-i shafā is the Nūr (Light/Divine Knowledge). The attitude of the participants is crucial in determining the level at which they would be able to acquire 'Divine Knowledge' which like water, is inexhaustible. This point is exemplified



clearly in the fīrman where Imām Sultan Muhammed Shah explained that the soul is not purified just by 'drinking water and clay' (māti). The benefits from ab-i shafā can only be derived if the Imān and the heart are 'pure' (Zanzibar 9.7.1899).

A common image used by Al-waezeens (specialists on exegesis) compares hans (swan) and bgla (duck). These are names of birds which have contrary eating habits. Ducks eat anything which comes on their way, while swans pick their food selectively. Those who are like ducks go 'thirsty', while sugra (those who are on the right path), like swans, drink to their heart's content. Participants are aware of the importance of the intention with which ab-i shafā is consumed. An elderly woman explained:

When we drink ab-i shafā, we are consuming Nūr. Through the Nūr, the heart (dil) becomes purified. We only benefit if we have the right intention and understanding.

In the context of transformation, water becomes a mediating element the effect of which is felt not so much at the cognitive level but during the time when it is consumed. Visibly it is water, but inside the heart (dil), ab-i shafā is 'Light'. Purification of the heart entails a movement towards a state of unison and repose.

The setting of the ceremony reveals that the primordial elements of water, light and white are given 'form' by the structure of the pāt. The pāt with its four corners represents the universe with an implicit center which points to the sacred. The pāt reaffirms the two levels of contraries and mediation. The four corners of the pāt, giving rise to the division of right and left and its implicit centre, symbolize the two planes of multiplicity and unity respectively. The structure of the pāt is reiterated in the four corners of the white cloth and the white towel in which the ghat-pāt is



wrapped. As the round shape of the vessels used contains an implicit center, it also reaffirms the presence of the sacred. The primordial elements reveal the generative powers of the sacred domain. These powers have their locus on the plane of movement and phenomena as well as that of unity. The ceremony of ghaṭ pāt as it 'unfolds' (like the cloth in which 'ghaṭ-pāt' is wrapped) provide two more contexts in which the above theme is expounded further. These are: (a) the timing of the ceremony and (b) the stages through which transformation of water is effected. Below, I present the data and the analysis of these contexts.

(iii) Timing Of The Ceremony Of Ghaṭ-pāt

The categories of material and spiritual are explicitly recognized in terms of day and night respectively. Earning a living, attending to the family and performance of the daily tasks are considered to be material activities which are to be pursued during the day. Night (apart from the six hours of sleeping)'is to be dedicated to the nourishment of spiritual life to be accomplished through prayers. In the ginān 'so kriya', this point is expressed as:

Din ughe karô dharāmsu kâ dhānthā
rāt paḍe thāvo ṣahebji kâ bandā

Translation:

During the day earn your living honestly
when night falls become a devotee of the Imām (ṣahebji).



and reiterated at several places in the firmāns. Here we note the quality of material life as being compounded in form. Pursuit of daily activities demands a greater division in terms of gender and age. In contrast, spiritual life is presented in terms of simplicity. The latter is understood in the form of a deemphasis on gender and age and the emergence of a unitive entity like the jama'at.

The ceremony of ghat-pāt is performed daily in the mornings and on Fridays and ceremonial occasions in the evenings. Early morning prayer is considered to contain greater spiritual forces than the evening prayer. This is because the latter takes place at the end of the day when a person is exposed to and 'accumulates' impurities from material life. Morning prayer precedes the pursuit of material life in the day and hence takes place in a state of purity. Several elderly informants presented the following view:

Morning time is the time of Nūr. Those who want to 'meet' Allah (khuda) go to Jama'at Khāna at this time. Evening time is kept for the removal of material impurities.

The timing of the ceremony points to an important difference. In the mornings, the daily performance of the ceremony takes place in an existing state of purity. The evening ceremony, performed occasionally, contributes to the cleansing of impurities accrued during the day. In the overall context of the mornings and evenings, the generative powers of the ceremony have different symbolic connotations which brings to light the following contraries:



Morning	Evening
dawn	sunset
commencement of material activity	end of material activity
'primordial state of purity'	purity - achieved through cleansing.

The distinction recognized between morning and evening prayers is transcended in relation to daytime. At this level, morning and evening form one unit which is dedicated for ritual and worship:

So (give) glory to God,
When ye reach eventide
And when ye rise
In the morning.

(s.xxx:17).

(iv) Stages effecting Transformation In The Ceremony:

Stage 1 - The Arrangement Of The Ghat-pāt

There are no preliminary preparations required in the ceremony. The formation of the cognitive model pertaining to the manifestation of the 'sacred' is a result of the participation of the assembled congregation (Jama'at). This is important in view of the fact that the congregation is a unified group reflecting the spiritual qualities of purity, 'power' and simplicity. The ceremony of ghat-pāt can be performed by any male, female, or young adult, none of whom are given further recognition since the performer acts on behalf of the congregation. The performer sits behind the pāt where the folded ghat-pāt is placed. Next to the performer sits the person (assistant) who distributes sukreet after ab-i shifā is consumed.

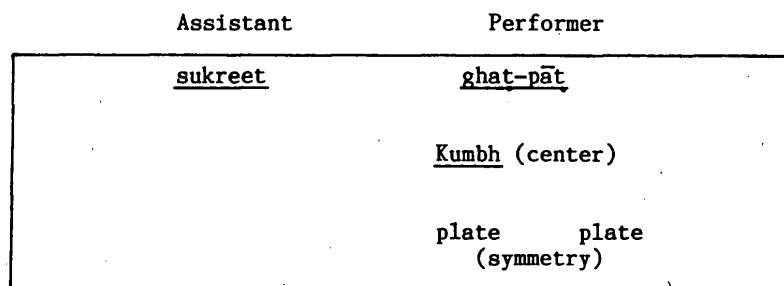


Alternatively, the performer may sit in between two assistants in which case the ghat-pāt is placed in between two plates of sukreet. The arrangement of the ghat-pāt is shown in diagram 17.

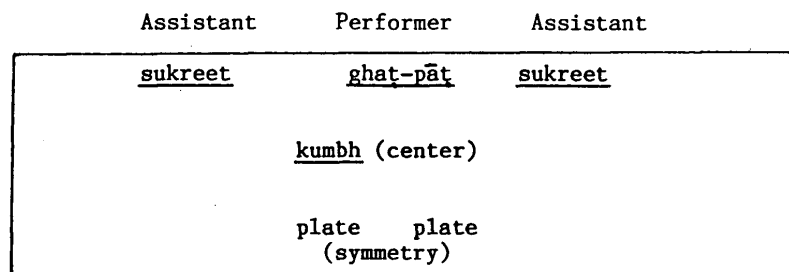
Diagram 17

The Arrangement Of ghat-pāt

Arrangement No.1.



Arrangement No. 2



Note: Each of the plates contain four mini-bowls.

There are a number of dimensions which come to light in the way in which 'ghat-pāt' is arranged on the pāt. Traditionally, the 'ghat-pāt' was arranged on the right side of the pāt and not the center. Center as essence becomes revealed on the right side, right being the symbol of action.



Of late, in order to accommodate the 'fast pace' of modern life, the 'ghat-pāt' is placed in between the two plates of sukreet. This arrangement points to the principle of condensation which is also operative in other situations noted throughout this study. Nevertheless, the 'ghat-pāt' is never placed on the left. Furthermore, we have a distinct relationship between the center (as represented by the kumbh) and the principle of symmetry as imaged in the arrangement of the plates and the mini-bowls. Here, the symbolic manifestation of the sacred highlights two forms: first, when the sacred becomes manifest it follows the 'law' of division – the center is not one but two, and in the context of the ceremony there is a further extension into four and eight. These numbers are significant because I have never seen an odd number of mini-bowls on the plate. (My observation was confirmed by informants). Although the center becomes manifest (that is it appears in a divided form), its manifested form continues to carry its essence. In the ceremony, the essence (i.e. the center) is symbolically represented by the round shape of all the vessels.

Another quality of the sacred is that its primary manifestation is in the form of an order. This order is formed by the principle of symmetry which adds a sense of harmony to the ceremony. As with the articulation of space in Jamā'āt Khāna, the sacred objects are never kept haphazardly; they are arranged in an orderly manner and the principle of symmetry contributes to the creation of this order.

Prior to the arrangement of the 'ghat-pāt', the latter is ritually cleansed. The ritual act is confirmed by the fact that the 'ghat-pāt' is otherwise spotlessly clean. Traditionally, the 'ghat-pāt' was cleansed with water. Presently, this step is condensed into the wiping of the



vessels after which they are incensed. The ritual cleansing of the vessels symbolizes the idea of purity. This point is reiterated in the ginān:

Kapdā ḡhowe so kiyā huwā
Dil ḡhowe so pāweh

Translation:

What do you gain if you just wash your clothes
You will only benefit if you cleanse your heart.

(Pir Sadar dīn, "Ejī sham ku avanta"
couplet 5).

Here the outward act of washing the clothes is extended to include the inner dimension of the heart. The arrangement of 'ghaṭ-pāt' portrays the two levels of multiplicity and unity.

Stage two: Enactment Of A Primordial Event:

Once the ghaṭ-pāt has been laid out, the performer pours water from the vessel (ghdhi) into the kumbh (main bowl) to which a few drops of niyāz from the bottle are added. Formerly, the niyāz was in the form of a 'tablet' made from sacred clay. The kumbh is then covered with a lid until it is time for the recitation of the second prayer (duʿā). The latter is recited by the performer of the ceremony. The duʿā is composed of six parts, and at the end of the fifth part there is a pause for a silent prayer. Before the duʿā is resumed, the performer picks up the small jug, fills it up with ab-i shafā from the kumbh and pours it into the eight mini-bowls and on the sukreet. Everytime the mini-bowl is filled, the performer says: 'firman' and the participants respond with the words: 'Ya-Ali Ya Muhammed'. This takes place nine times, corresponding with the eight mini-bowls and the sukreet and then the performer continues to recite the duʿā until it is completed.



The second stage in the ceremony is an enactment of a primordial event consisting of the manifestation of the sacred on the plane of phenomena and becoming. The event at one level results from a 'harmonious' combination of two contraries: water and 'matter'. This combination is reminiscent of the creation of Adam, comprising matter and spirit. Water, originally in a formless state, in the context of the ritual is given form by being contained in a vessel (kumbh). Water is a liquid substance without colour or shape. The vessel is solid, round in shape and white in colour. The contraries are mediated through the element of niyāz which was formerly 'sacred clay'. The latter partakes of the Divine essence and its created form. While the niyāz transforms the water and makes it 'pure', its sacredness is intensified through the recitation of du‘ā. Congregational prayers entail a number of body movements among which the act of prostration is primary:

But bow down in adoration
And bring thyself
The closer (to God)

(s.xciv:19).

In the context of the ceremony, the recitation of the prayer and the peak moments of prostrations represent a level of transcendence whereby the contraries of water and matter are momentarily dissolved into the essence (the nirīnjan i.e. formlessness) of the Divine. This moment is captured and symbolically enacted in the pouring of ab-i shafa into the mini-bowls. The communicative mode used is that of 'firman' (said by the performer) with the response from the Jama‘āt: 'Ya Ali Ya Muhammed'. The firman is the Qur‘anic kun (be) representing the time before the world was created. Ya Ali Ya Muhammed represents the manifestation of the Divine in a perfect form. Sūfi tradition attributes two connotations to the name of Muhammed. In a hadith of the Prophet: 'I am Ahmad (= Muhammed) without the letter "M"' (Schimmel



1975:224), Ahad is interpreted as being 'One' (tawhid) and creatureliness is attributed to the letter 'M'. The Ismaili tradition considers the Imām to be the mazhār (the 'manifested' form) of the Divine in the world of phenomena. These examples show that a significant focus of the ceremony of ghaṭ-pāt is to show how the contraries and manifested forms are transcended and given a unitive form (refer to Diagram 18).

The completion of the second prayer marks the end of the process whereby the sacred becomes manifest in the ceremony. In the following part, we shall continue to examine the process whereby the qualities representing multiplicity 'encounter' the sacred by means of mediation of contraries.



Diagram 18

Enactment Of A Primordial Event In The Ceremony Of ghat-pāt

Primordial State	State Of Creation	State of Dissolution (transcendence)
water (formlessness)	water in the <u>kumbh</u> (given form)	water transformed into <u>Nār</u> (Light)
	hearing and speaking	silence
	standing and sitting	prostration
Centre	round, symmetry triangle	no shape
One	four and eight	No numbers (congregation)

Activation Of The Cognitive Model

(i) The Mediating Role Of Mukhi

The qualities of the material world of movement and phenomena are first discerned in the ritual context when members of the congregation stand up and disperse to consume ab-i shafā. The hierarchical order (classed as material) comes into focus as the Mukhi followed by the leaders consume ab-i shafā, prior to other members of the assembled congregation. The same order is followed in the female section. The Mukhi acts as a mediator between the hierarchical and gender divisions on the one hand and the congregation on the other. As we have already observed, the Mukhi forms part of the hierarchical order and is also above it; he is a 'leader' as well as part of the



congregation. The Mukhi's gender role is affirmed at one level and transcended at another. In this respect, we have a ritual representation of the existence of the spiritual quality of simplicity (lack of division) in the midst of material life which is characterized by multiplicity.

(ii) Body Imagery:

The usage of body imagery is of considerable significance in the activation of the cognitive model in the ceremony. In the Islamic/Ismaili tradition, the upright and the prostrated postures of man are two symbolic polarities around which the status of man is ritually defined. The upright posture is recognized as the prerogative of man which gives him a higher position on earth in relation to other forms of creation:

We have indeed created man
In the best of moulds.

(S.xcv:4).

Nevertheless, man is also assigned the responsibility of cultivating the spiritual life in the midst of material pursuits. This being a mammoth task, man is asked to 'remember' (worship) Allah in order to achieve spiritual rejuvenation. During this time, it becomes necessary for man to abandon his material concerns momentarily and this gesture is symbolically depicted in the act of prostration.

In the ceremony of ghat-pāt, the participants perform a 'half-prostration' pose in order to pick up the mini-bowl containing ab-i shafā. This has symbolic significance as the pose falls in-between the upright posture and complete prostration which can only be accomplished while sitting on the floor. The half-prostration establishes a level at which other



parts of the body i.e. hands and face are activated. The performance of the ceremony by the participants involves the following body movements:

When the participant (who is standing in a line) reaches the pāt, he places a coin in a plate and picks up the mini-bowl with his right hand. The action requires a half-prostration as the pāts are low. The mini-bowl is held on the right palm which is placed over the left palm. The participant then closes his eyes and offers a silent prayer. After this, the participant opens his eyes and says: 'firmān', to which the performer responds with the words: 'Ya Ali Ya Muhammed'. The participant then lifts the mini-bowl towards his mouth (with palms still held together) and 'drinks' ab-i shafā. Using his right hand, he puts the bowl back on the plate to be refilled for the next person. The participant then moves on the left where sukreet is kept. He picks up a small piece of square paper with his right hand and positions it in the same manner as the mini-bowl. The performer's assistant takes a spoonful of sukreet and places it on the paper. This act is also accompanied by an exchange of words: 'Hay zindā', and 'kayam payā' (see diagram 19).



realpatidar.com

150

Diagram 19

Body Imagery In The Ceremony Of Ghat-pāt

Spiritual World Of Simplicity

Unitive Experience
(state of enlightenment)

Exterior
(drinking)

Interior
(*'heart'*)

Unison.
(silence)

speaking

Hearing

Unison.
(prayers)

open eyes

closed eyes

Unison.
(palms together)

right hand

left hand

Half Prostration
(poised between the material and the spiritual)

Upright Body Posture

Material World Of Movement And Phenomena

realpatidar.com



The above diagram reveals that the consumption of ab-i shafa involves a series of stages marking an upward movement which leads to the ultimate level of 'experience'. This upward movement is marked by a symbolic unity (with an implicit center) of two distinct parts or acts of the body which reach a peak moment of experience.

Each of the stages can be observed as follows:

- (a) The right hand (action) and the left hand (repose) are brought together in an act of unison through the mini-bowl containing ab-i shafa. Here we have the two primordial symbols of white and water with the geometrical motif of round.
- (b) The closing and opening of the eyes is injected with an act of prayer. Here the inward act of praying mediates the outward movements of 'opening' and 'closing'.
- (c) In the acts involving speaking and hearing, the interjection of silence brings about a unitive state.
- (d) The final act of 'drinking' is a movement which climaxes a progression from an outward into the inward state. The inward state is symbolized by the heart which is a symbol of the presence of the Divine.

While the experience of being cleansed is still fresh (at least conceptually), the participants move towards the left and partake of sukreet (sweet dish) comprised of the following:



Ingredients used in sukreet

Spiritual	Material
<u>ab-i shafā</u>	semolina
	milk
	sugar
	butter

Sukreet is eaten and it marks a symbolic 'descent' into the world of phenomena and movement. This point can be exemplified through the explanation offered by specialists:⁴

- (a) Semolina flour signifies patience and suffering as this ingredient is ground into 'nothingness' from its original form.
- (b) Sugar is a symbol of happiness.
- (c) Milk symbolizes purity
- (d) Butter is a symbol of unity.

The cultivation and nourishment of the above qualities lead to the advancement of the spirit in its journey towards the Absolute. Just like water (which is transformed into Nūr), sukreet is also transformed in the ceremony. In its former state when the dish is cooked, it is known as siro. When ab-i shafā is poured into it, it becomes sukreet. Sukreet is made of five ingredients out of which four are solid and are commonly used in the preparation of foods in material life. The fifth ingredient, ab-i shafā represents the spiritual.



Sukreet is a symbolic expression of the presence of the spiritual in the material. It is important to note that the material is expressed in terms of qualities which allow the 'spirit' to flourish. The point which is expressed is that the material elements need to be 'transformed' before they can be infused with qualities from the spiritual. This is an expressive theme in the ceremony of ghaṭ-pāt. The spiritual quality in the form of ab-i shafā is 'poured' into the material product which is presented in a transformed state so that it can reflect the presence of the spirit.

In parts one and two of this chapter, we have seen the formation and activation of the cognitive model revealing the two processes of the manifestation of the sacred and its infusion into the 'transformed' material world. The principle of centrality and symmetry characterizes the manifestation of the sacred. The centre points to the origins and therefore acts as a mediating element while the principle of symmetry simultaneously contains contraries as well as a sense of order (as instanced in the arrangement of 'ghaṭ-pāt'). The activation of the model, which commences with the consumption of ab-i shafā, highlights body imagery where the contraries like those of right/left, open/close are mediated through the symbolic act of unison. In this way, hearing and speaking relate to the unitive act of silence.

Although the principle of contraries and mediation govern both the processes of the formation and the activation of the model, there is an important distinction which is crucial. The formation of the cognitive model symbolizes the 'descent' of the sacred. For example, the water is initially placed on the floor away from the 'structure' of the pāt. Activation of the model signifies an 'ascent' from the material to that of the spiritual. The

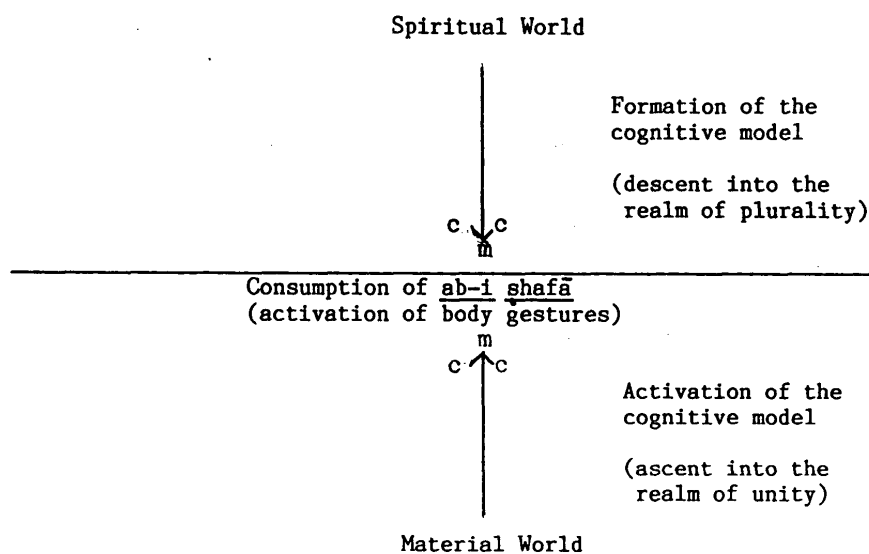


ascent commences cognitively when the participants 'activate' body gestures.

The two processes are illustrated as follows:

Diagram 20

Formation And Activation Of The Cognitive Model



Key:

c.c. contraries
m. mediation.



It is important to note the subtle shifts of elements which function both as part of contraries (multiplicity) as well as mediators (unity). This principle will lead to deeper insights into the process of adaptation to the vicissitudes of life as Ismailis experience it in their new homeland. Some of their major concerns are covered in part III of this study. Nevertheless these concerns form the subject of discussion soon after the congregation disperses. In the following part, I present some of the topics which form the subject of conversation in the Jamā'āt Khāna and make observations on some of the issues which have emerged as a result of the 'interaction' between traditional patterns of thought and developing trends from the western Canadian environment. As noted earlier, in the Jamā'āt Khāna, some of these issues have been expressed through ritual.

Vicissitudes Of Social Life In Relation To Ritual

Once the participants have consumed ab-i shafā, they disperse and converse informally with other members of the congregation. This is one time in Jamā'āt Khāna which is relatively unstructured. Inside the Jamā'āt Khāna, the gender distinction continues to be observed, and during this time the conversation topics reflect the differences in interests and aspirations between men and women. The former most commonly cover the areas of business, economic issues, and career goals, while the latter cover topics which range from hairstyles and dressing, child care, domestic issues and, of late, education and job opportunities. Those participants who have stepped outside the Jamā'āt Khāna hall and have put on their shoes intermingle on a non-gender basis.



This time of unstructured activity, though not given any formal recognition, is considered to be vital for the participants; my data reveal that it provides a strong motivation for attendance in Jamā'āt Khāna. A large number of Ismailis obtain useful information through the exchange of ideas pertaining to 'life in Canada'. Several informants revealed to me that they obtained jobs just by talking to other Ismailis who happened to know of existing vacancies. Likewise, young mothers with newly-born babies obtain useful hints about the 'dons and do's' by talking to others who have already gone through, as one mother explained, 'critical stages of motherhood.'

Apart from the exchange of information, Jamā'āt Khāna provides the 'center' where ties among friends, acquaintances and kinship relations are strengthened. It is one of the places where the network of social ties can be extended as new friendships are formed. It is common for young girls and boys to meet in Jamā'āt Khāna and crystalize their friendship in the form of matrimonial ties. For the elders, Jamā'āt Khāna is a 'heavenly refuge'. A number of the elderly males and females informed me that they spend their whole day with the expectation of going to Jamā'āt Khāna. One elderly lady related:

I do not think that I would have been able to survive in this country without Jamā'āt Khāna.

This is because the elders being confined spatially (lack of social interaction) during the day time, find an 'open space' in Jamā'āt Khāna where congregants interact before leaving for home. The need for the elders to go to Jamā'āt Khāna is so vital that it has received special attention from the community. Elders are provided special transportation either through special mini buses or through cars driven by volunteers.



The informal time in Jamā'āt Khāna reflects a number of environmental features. In essence, it points to characteristic urban life where people have relatively less time for social interaction. Were it not for the Jamā'āt Khāna, the social interaction among Ismailis between males, females, males and females, elders and young and among youngsters and elders would be confined within a narrow range.

It is a paradoxical feature of urban life that though it offers a greater range of options regarding various sectors of activities, the information pertaining to these activities is not easily accessible. In this respect, Jamā'āt Khāna, through the network of social interaction and community identity that it sustains, provides a medium for the dissemination of such information.

It is in the midst of an unstructured interaction when the participants converse on a wide variety of issues, that they pause silently two times when the 'ghat-pāt' is re-folded. Technical terms used for this process are 'ghat-pāt uthapānji' and 'ghat-pāt kayam karānji'. These are considered to be significant steps as they mark the 'exit' of sacred powers with an emphatic note to the effect that they are eternal and will return again. The 'exit' of powers is also expressed through the departure of the spiritual beings who are believed to be present during the ceremony. The 'silent pauses' when prayers are recited are significant reminders of the continual presence of the spiritual in material life. Such an awareness is considered to be vital for an Ismaili.



Continuity And Change.

(1) The Ritual Context.

We have already made note of the two structural changes made in the ceremony of ghat-pāt. These are the omission of water in the ritual cleansing of 'ghat-pāt' and the placement of the kumbh in-between two plates of sukreet. These measures point to the principle of condensation which has emerged in response to the modern emphasis on 'efficiency' and maximization of time. Participants informed me that if these changes were not made, the ceremony would take longer both for the performer as well as the participants. There are a number of other concerns which reveal in a telling manner some of the ways in which Ismailis are adapting to their new environment.

There are two matters which have arisen in relation to sukreet. First, there was a brief attempt to substitute sweets for sukreet. The reasons cited were that as sweets are bought ready-made, it saves time and effort and that sweets are more 'manageable' as sukreet can fall on the carpet and make the latter sticky. I gathered from informants that the Jamā'āt's sentiments were hurt and the attempt was abandoned. Secondly, there are some objections raised to the eating of sukreet because of the high-caloried ingredients of butter and sugar. Some of the participants take a grain of sukreet instead of a spoonful though it should be emphasised that no-one refuses the 'sacred offering'. One of the questions which is often discussed among participants is whether it is respectful to take a grain instead of a spoonful. Although some of the participants feel that a 'sacred offering' should be taken respectfully (i.e. the whole spoon), the participants seem to have resolved the issue in three ways:



- (a) Some participants take the whole spoon and eat it with the understanding that the calorie factor is irrelevant in this case.
- (b) Others take a whole spoon, put a few grains in the mouth and give the rest to the children.
- (c) Others take only a few grains from the spoon. In this case instead of the palms only two fingers are used.

The fact that three different alternatives have been worked out is a recent phenomenon. An adult male explained:

These days 'anything' is acceptable. People are given considerable amount of freedom. In the past there would only be one way of doing things and everybody would be expected to follow it.

Conversations with respondents revealed that at one point there were some questions raised regarding the hygienic factor involved in a number of people drinking ab-i shafā from one mini-bowl. Objection was raised on the grounds that germs could be transmitted if one bowl is shared by a number of participants. This example points to a clash between the traditional attitude of sharing based on communal solidarity and the 'rationalistic' understanding of modern science where the interests of the individual are given foremost attention. The objection was short lived as the participants consume ab-i shafā without any hesitation with an implicit understanding that 'infection does not spread in a sacred place like that of Jamā'at Khāna'. One mother exemplified this point further:

I have been giving ab-i shafā to my daughter since she was one month old. She is five years old now and I do not remember her having caught any infection because of this practice. In fact, when I go to Jamā'at Khāna I let other children play with the toys of my daughter. When children are small they put things in their mouth but no type of infection can spread in Jamā'at Khāna.



During a ceremonial occasion, I observed an instance whereby a floral arrangement was placed on the pāt of ghat-pāt. As we have noted, professionally arranged flowers are placed on other pāts. As this incident did not recur, I inquired further and was informed that it was odd and inappropriate to have flowers on the pāt of ghat-pāt. It seems that the flowers 'violated' the basic structure of the ceremony which comprises the primordial elements of light, white and water. Beyond this, the flowers would complicate the 'simplicity' of the ceremony expressed by the element of water. It is illuminating to note that on ceremonial occasions there are special items placed on the pāts of Mukhī and Mukhyāni. For instance, the milk which is kept on ordinary days is replaced by sherbat which is an enriched drink containing ice cream, almonds and colour. The water which is 'transformed' into ab-i shafā in the ceremony is invariably kept in its basic form. The attempt to place a floral arrangement on the pāt was at one level an expression of 'modern affluence' that more people are enjoying in the west. As this addition seemed to affect the structural coherence of the ceremony, it was rejected.



(ii) Life Cycle:

Regardless of the reasons why a participant may be present in Jamā'at khāna, he is exposed to the cognitive model which, through ritual expression continues to embody fundamental principles of the Ismaili tradition. However, these principles are perceived not so much at the level of interpretation of ritual symbols but in their actualization in various situations. Given the progressive movement from material to spiritual life, embodied ideally in the life cycle of individuals, the responses from the participants fell into the following categories: the elders, the adults and the youth.

The above groups demarcate in a telling manner some of the developments which have occurred within the community over the last five decades. The elders with whom I conversed are retired in the sense that they do not work outside the home. All of them spoke in Gujarati. The adults represent the category of working males and females with the sole exception of some mothers who had opted to stay at home to tend to their children. The adults used English as well as Gujarati. Many of the youths whom I talked to had been to school or were going to school in Canada. Although I expected different responses from them, this was not always the case.

Elderly Informants:

It must be clearly understood that ab-i shafā has numerous benefits. But these benefits are only effective if understood in the right spirit. The benefits cannot all be acquired at once. It is a gradual process and in religious matters one must learn to be patient. I myself have always believed that ab-i shafā has a purifying effect on the soul. Our soul is like a mirror; the more it is cleaned the better will be the reflection. Ultimately of course it is a matter of visvas (faith). Faith is a very powerful force, it can achieve a lot



for us. If one does not have faith then one might just as well not participate in the ceremony.

I believe that ab-i shafā purifies our hearts and this leads to sapudi (wisdom). You know, when my children were small, I used to give them ab-i shafā early in the morning. I think that my children grew up to be all right - they do not have any bad habits like drinking or smoking. Ab-i shafā has many benefits. These days not many people understand. People are becoming too materialistic.

The most common terms which were repeatedly used by elderly informants when they talked about rituals were: purity, unity, wisdom, and faith. The elders firmly adhered to the belief that these qualities could be acquired if ab-i shafā is consumed with understanding. The enlightenment so acquired would enable one to live 'meaningfully'. The meaningful content of their lives include basically family and kinship ties, the Jamā'at and ultimately love and devotion to the Imām. With respect to the Jamā'at, which provides the framework within which all the ritual ceremonies are performed, the following examples are illustrative of the possibilities and limitations of the traditional world of the Ismailis.

I learnt from a male informant that an elderly man repeatedly performed the ceremony of du'ā karawī. The Mukhi was baffled and upon inquiring it was discovered that the man was performing the ceremony for fellow Ismailis in Tanzania as he had discovered that 'they were in trouble'. As it so happened, the man was from Uganda and did not really know these Ismailis.

The second incident relates to a male informant who revealed that every month he sends a certain amount of money to Ismaili orphans in India because he felt that it was his duty to help fellow Ismailis. For the elders the 'enlightenment and the wisdom' derived from performances in Jamā'at khāna could be translated in terms of assistance offered to other Ismailis in everyday life. Their milieu of social interaction included only Ismailis as



my observations indicate that their contact with non-Ismailis was minimal. Marginal contact with outsiders occurred during visits to the doctor, shopping and occasional interaction with the neighbours.

The Adults.

The following extracts form a representative sample:

I get psychological satisfaction when I drink ab-i shafā. I feel that I have purified my heart and when I go out to work the next day, I would like to maintain that feeling. I try and live in an Islamic manner i.e. truthfully and honestly. I think that the feeling of purity is important. I also feel a greater attachment to other Ismailis. It is important, in this day and age, to acquire peace of mind. When I go to Jamā'at Khāna and participate in all the ceremonies, I feel different. I get a sense of inner contentment.

I get inner satisfaction when I drink ab-i shafā. I think that I would feel empty without it.

I really believe that ab-i shafā purifies my heart when I drink it.

Frankly, drinking ab-i shafā does not make any difference. I drink it because it is our tradition.

I do not think that rituals are very important. I would like to spend more time in meditation.

Sometimes I get satisfaction when I drink ab-i shafā; at other times, I do not feel anything. It all depends on the frame of mind I am in.

The above extracts from conversations with adult males and females reveal subtle attitudes and ideas which can be classified as being 'modern' as well as traditional. One of the characteristic features of modern life is its emphasis on individualism. This term is used here in the way in which it is defined and understood by the Ismailis. In sum, it is taken in the form of 'openness' which enables a person to exercise choice out of a number of things. For instance, in East Africa going to Jamā'at Khāna daily was for



many Ismailis a regular activity. In Canada, individuals seem to make their own choices as to how they are going to spend their time, and this attitude has affected many sectors of the current life of the Ismailis. The element of choice exercised at an individual level is expressed in terms of opinions and feelings, which are personal. The elders talked about the effects of the ceremony in terms of 'we', taking it for granted that everyone should feel the same way at least ideally. The adults seem to express a wider range of opinions as instanced in the phrases: 'psychological satisfaction', 'peace of mind', and 'empty' which have a bearing on modern life style. These are the terms which are commonly used to describe how individuals feel and experience their world.

Beyond 'individuality', there is an emerging clash between the 'modern scientific attitude', and the 'symbolic content', which forms an integral part of traditional cultures like that of the Ismailis. In the case of ghat-pāt, the issue was at one point given expression in terms of 'infection' by transmission of germs on the one hand, and the need to establish ties of brotherhood and sisterhood on the basis of sharing from one mini-bowl on the other hand. As we have noted, this issue has been resolved in favour of fostering community solidarity. In the case of sukreet, the situation appears to be more complex as participants who refrain from eating their share at least put a few grains in their mouth overlooking the traditional view expressed by elders that 'a sacred offering should be taken and eaten as given'. The fact that all the participants take part in the ceremony reveal that there is an attempt made to accommodate both attitudes, the traditional as well as the modern.



In practice, all the three groups, the elders, the adults and the youths have continued to maintain the tradition of ghat-pāt. Regardless of whether they believe in the efficacy of the ceremony, they all consume ab-i shafa and have sukreet. Although the youngsters did not explicate the ceremony beyond repeating what their parents or grandparents had told them, namely that the ceremony had a purifying effect on the heart, they cherished it as a form of tradition. The most common views expressed by the youths are:

The ceremony of ghat-pāt is our anchorage which is very necessary during times of change. It is our tradition and we should keep it that way.

I really cannot say whether ghat-pāt can purify our hearts as my mother says. But it is our tradition and I would feel lost if someone came and told me that this ceremony has been omitted. Were it not for the ceremonies, what would we do in 'Khane'?

At first about six years ago, I felt that the ceremonies did not serve any function. I thought it was part of the 'excess baggage' that we had brought from East Africa. But now I feel differently. Why should we abandon our traditions? I feel really nice when I participate in the ceremony of ghat-pāt. It is so different from anything else that we do in our secular life.

I believe that there is symbolic significance in the ceremonies. They are important because they help us to understand what religion is.



Conclusion

The ritual ceremony of ghaṭ-pāṭ has highlighted the interplay between the given structural content of ritual and its actualization by the participants. The relationship between the two reveals the ambiguous organization of contraries. In the given content of the ritual, we observed the process of mediation of contraries leading to an 'experiential moment' observable when the participants drink the 'sacred water' which 'purifies' the heart. However, once the participants disperse, the subjects discussed, informally, relate to daily life which the Ismailis classify as being material. Daily life is governed by a state of activity and multiplicity as opposed to the state of unison and repose prevalent in Jamā'āt Khāna. The Ismailis are aware of the reassertion of contraries and oppositions which confront them in daily life. In this respect the 'heart' will again be subject to impurities imbibed in the very act of living. The Ismailis confront the ambiguity of mediation of contraries and their reassertion through the organization of time and space which accommodate both the material and the spiritual. In daily life, a spatial movement is observable outwards spreading into a network of social relationships. The time spent revolves around the notion of activity exemplified in the culinary practice. However, the presence of the spiritual elements is affirmed in an otherwise material context of life. The analysis of the culinary practice in the next chapter shows how the presence of the spiritual (embodying the temporal and spatial forms representing unity and repose) is accommodated into space and time geared towards multiplicity and activity.



Footnotes.

1. The term structure is used to mean the interrelation of parts or the principle of organization in a complex entity, The Houghton Mifflin Canadian Dictionary Of The English Language, (Ontario: Houghton Mifflin Co. Ltd., 1980).
2. Oral and verbal exegesis was collected during fieldwork from five specialists who gave interpretations of Ismaili rituals; such interpretations are many times explained to members of the community in gatherings organized for the purpose.
3. See note 2 above.
4. A. Nanji, "Ritual And Symbolic Aspects Of Islam In African Contexts," Contributions To Asian Studies, vol.17, (1982), p.106 and verbal exegesis confirm that sukreet symbolizes moral qualities.



Part III Daily Life

Chapter 6

Food And Cosmos: Affirmation Of The Spiritual In The Material.

Introduction

Given the opposite but interrelated categories of material and spiritual, space and time are articulated differentially in ritual and daily life. In part II, we discussed an inward movement into space and time epitomized by the state of unity and repose symbolized in ritual, emphasising the point that this movement is progressive and is accomplished through mediation of contraries. In their daily life, the organization of space and time is directed outwards, creating a state of multiplicity and activity. Multiplicity is expressed through social ties (family, kin and the outside world) while activity is a function of cooking and earning of livelihood. In this chapter I focus on the activity of cooking in order to elucidate the point that although space is organized differentially in ritual and daily life, they are interrelated. In this respect, the Ismaili culinary practice is a symbolic expression of the Ismaili cosmic formulation incorporating the material and the spiritual. As explained earlier, material and spiritual reach the highest level of convergence in man. In this respect, man attempts to affirm the significance of the spiritual order in an otherwise material context.



Ismailis define cooking as a material activity. There are two significant features of cooking which are specifically relevant to our analysis. First, cooking is a dynamic activity. We argue in this chapter that such an activity embodies different elements like the constitution of foods, modes of cooking, and the times when meals are served. Among Ismailis, these elements though they appear to be material contain qualities which have affinities with the spiritual. Furthermore, cooking effects a transformation of qualities from both the material and spiritual. It is in this transformed state that a symbolic model of 'interaction' between material and spiritual is presented.

The second feature of cooking pertains to the role of Ismaili women perceived as 'mediators' between material and spiritual. Discussion of this perspective requires an understanding of organization of space in Ismaili households. Through references from literary sources and ethnographic profiles of Ismaili women, we shall demonstrate the dynamics of spatial organization as conceived traditionally as well as in the new Western milieu. This point is expounded in the following chapter.

Data

Data for this chapter have been collected through observations of twenty five Ismaili households in Vancouver. These observations were made over a period of eight months during which time I had an opportunity to visit each household at least once. All the households included married couples with children. The visits were spaced out in such a way that I had an opportunity to meet and observe the families during day-time, evenings, weekdays, weekends and on festive occasions. My observations on the preparation of food were



complemented with conversations, open-ended interviews and life histories. Beyond this, my personal knowledge and experience of the community proved to be invaluable in acquiring further insights into the households, particularly the significance of cooking. Invaluable knowledge of the community in the Western environment was also obtained during my visit to Europe in the summer of 1983 when I stayed with Ismaili families.¹

The Dynamism Of Cooking: The Symbolic Model.

(i) Constitution Of Foods.

I have not gone to work to-day, I have to cook.

The above is an extract from the conversation which I had with a female informant during my fieldwork. It was 11 a.m. when I walked into the house of Rabia who is married with three children and presently works in an insurance firm. The first thing I noticed was a plateful of raw onions which had been chopped with the 'kitchen magic' (a gadget). I soon learnt that a very special menu was being prepared for Rabia's in-laws who were arriving from Tanzania. The menu arranged in the serving order comprised the following items.



Diagram 21

Traditional Ismaili Menu

	Category	Elements	Mode
Course 1	'savā (vermicelli) (light')	flour, sugar & butter ²	sweet - hot & fried
	samu'sa (pastry) (heavy)	flour, meat oil	savoury - hot & fried
Course 2	vegetable curry (light')	vegetables, spices & oil	savoury - hot fried/boiled
	unleavened bread light/heavy	flour	savoury - smoked
Course 3	biryani	rice, chicken	savoury - hot
	heavy salad (light)	oil & spices raw vegetables	fried/boiled 'neutral' cold
Course 4	pudding (light')	milk, sugar	sweet - cold
	fruits (light)	eggs fruits	cooked sweet fresh, raw

By staying at home in order to prepare a traditional meal for her in-laws, Rabia was creating a situation (temporarily) which would be considered as traditional. By comparison, Shirin (married with one son and working in a day-care centre) and Noori (mother of two children running a food store) had come up with other alternatives to entertain their kin. Shirin had made preparations the previous night in order to prepare a special meal for her mother in-law who was visiting from Toronto. Shirin was obliged to include her brother in-law's family of five where her mother in-law was staying. Shirin's menu consisted of:



Diagram 22

Canadian/Traditional Menu

Course 1	Category	Elements	Mode
	<u>savā</u> (<u>'light'</u>)	flour,sugar & butter	sweet - hot fried
Course 2	chicken <u>tika</u> (<u>'heavy'</u>) chinese rice (<u>'heavy'</u>)	chicken & spices rice, meat & vegetables	savoury - hot roast or grilled savoury - hot boiled
Course 3	ice cream (<u>'light'</u>)	milk & sugar	sweet - cold ready-made

Noori decided that she could not cope with eight relatives from her sister in-law's household and so she opted to take her guests to a Chinese restaurant. Noori informed me that this was an economical way of entertaining though she could not do this too often as it was still expensive to take people out for a meal. While the invitation was graciously accepted, it led to tensions and strain as Noori decided to leave out her sister-in-law's three children aged thirteen and over. Noori felt that she could not take everyone as it would be expensive. I discovered in relation to other households that there were times when, because of pressures of having to cater for too many people, children and sometimes other members of the household were not invited. This is another example of the principle of condensation at work, though in the above example feelings of bitterness were expressed. Noori related that her sister in-law made it quite clear that if her children were left out on other occasions, she would not accept future invitations.



The two menus in diagrams 21 and 22 reveal traditional patterns of the Ismaili culinary system, as well as emergent patterns. The latter are expressions of extraneous cultural influences. We shall examine both the areas in so far as they relate to the question of continuity and change.

Traditional Ismaili cooking is a symbolic expression of the way in which material and spiritual are juxtaposed and complemented by means of mediation. Ismaili cuisine consists of heavy and light foods. Heavy foods reflect elements from the material world while light foods have closer affinities with the spiritual world. We have observed earlier that the material is defined by the qualities of multiplicity and cultural 'impurities'. As opposed to this, the spiritual is characterized by simplicity (conceived in terms of lesser divisions of parts) and purity. Primarily, the categories of light and heavy foods are culturally defined, though some physiological connections may also be observed.

In the first menu, the core dish served is biryani. Without this dish, the other courses would not comprise a meal. The main ingredients used are meat, rice and oil. Biryani is categorized as heavy and this state is empirically expressed in terms of 'filling up the stomach'. Consider the following incident related by Shirin:

Two years ago, I went to Kenya to visit my family down there. I do not care too much for biryani or curries. I think that such dishes make us put on weight and give us the 'Indian figure'. I expressed a preference for eating vegetables. Every home that I visited, I was served with curry or biryani. If I did not eat the latter, everyone would say how can I fill up my stomach. I used to eat so much salads that people would say 'I was eating grass'.

In the Ismaili tradition, eating and filling up the stomach is categorized as a material activity. As we have already observed, in their homeland, Ismailis ate their main meal at noon or a couple of hours before or



after the gathering in Jamā'āt Khāna. This is because a heavy stomach (which nourishes material life) and prayers (which nourishes spiritual life) are considered to be incompatible. Beyond this, the association of heavy foods with material life covers categories of people to whom heavy foods are served primarily. These categories are:

- (a) Men
- (b) Family and kin
- (c) Invited guests

The above categories represent different aspects of material life. Men are expected to consume solid foods as their involvement in material life, as bread-earners, is more intense and active. When men 'go out' to earn their living, they encounter a host of situations which may be polluting.³

Whenever we go out to earn (kamava), we are confronted with janjad (web) in which we have to manipulate a number of events and things. Sometimes we have to tell lies, at other times we make mistakes. We may hurt somebody's feelings. If you are out there in the world, it is very difficult to remain without gunah (mistakes).

(Extract of a gujerati interview with a male informant)

Earning is regarded as the epitome of material life. In the firmāns and the gināns, a clear distinction is made between material life, associated with earning a living, and spiritual life, which is associated with prayers.

Consider the following extracts.

.....With entire absorption in the work during the day and then higher prayers at night, a new life may come provided the two occupations are total. So concentrate all your free time and thought to this end.

(Imam Sultan Muhammed Shah 7.5. 1953).

Eji din ughe karo qhāramsūka qhandā
rat padhe thāvo sāhebji ka bandā



translation:

During the day time, earn your living (honestly)
At night become the devotee of the Imām.

(verse from the ginān so kriya)

My observations in the field indicate that Ismaili women commonly prepare traditional meals for the men, other members of the family and Jamā'at Khāna. Very little or a minimal amount of cooking is done when the men are not around. One woman related to me that while her husband was in the hospital (a period of five days), she did not cook. She explained further that cooking really meant making curry, rice and unleavened bread. Soups and boiled vegetables are not counted formally as cooking.

The second category of people to whom solid meals are served comprise family members and kith and kin. The extended family unit which was prevalent in traditional times required women to prepare a variety of dishes, a task which was accomplished by spending a number of hours (four to five) in the kitchen. With the emergence of the nuclear family unit, this practice does not seem to be prevalent though it is reactivated occasionally, as we observed in the incident of the woman who stayed home to prepare a meal for her in-laws. The traditional practice of serving solid foods to family and kin represents the idea of kutumb parivar i.e. material ties. At one level, these ties represent material life to the extent that the latter can entrap the spirit. An elderly male informant exemplified this further:

During the time of Imam Hussein (second Imām), one of his followers requested the Imām to give him the opportunity to go on jung (war) so that he can sacrifice his life for the Imām. In reply, the Imām asked his murīd (follower) to go home and that he would be called later on. Soon after, the Imām made arrangements for his murīd to have a house and a wife. After some time, he had children. Then one day, the Imām sent a messenger asking his murīd to take part in the jung. On



hearing this request, the murīd replied: 'Tell the Imām to find somebody else to-day. I shall come tomorrow'.

The above anecdote is a dramatic illustration of the entrapment of the spirit in the material world considered as a matrix of family ties. The form of entrapment is complex as the murīd's state of having been entrapped is not realized until it is time to act. It is the moment of action which really determines the position of the protagonist in the story. The idea that family ties can entrap the spirit is reiterated in one of the gināns compiled by Pir Sadar-din:

Eji pinjar padiyō pariwar nō
koike bujāte jān.

Translation:

The cage of pariwar (family) has fallen (over us)
only a few people realize this.

From the above, we can see that there is a correspondence between family and kin and material life. As the family primarily consumes solid foods, the close association between the latter and material life is also established.

Likewise, my knowledge of the community and field observations indicate that invited guests are invariably served solid food, as defined traditionally, or its adapted variations which are emerging in the Canadian milieu. Guests also represent a form of material life as they signify a web of social ties which might entangle the spirit. Oftentimes, I have heard that women are not able to go to Jamā'at khāna when they have guests for a meal. Having established the categories of people to whom solid foods are served and seen how these categories represent part of material life, we now focus our attention on the characteristic features of solid foods.

Three main items used in the preparation of heavy dishes are: meat, oil (ghee) and rice. Ismailis classify meat as a status food. If one is able to



purchase meat for daily consumption, and able to serve generous portions to guests, one is considered to be wealthy. However, the consumption of meat embodies an ambiguity. One area where this ambiguity is partially expressed is in the firmāns of the 48th Imām, Sir Sultan Muhammed Shah. Within the overall context of generating an awareness of health among Ismailis, the Imām emphatically made the point that meat is to be consumed in small quantities, preferably two or three times a week (Kalam e Imam e Mubin, Firmāns from 1911-1951 part 2, 1951:195, 207, 219, 306, 339, 402, 477). Overconsumption of meat will lead to the creation of a 'graveyard' in the stomach. On the other hand, underconsumption of meat will lead to an anemic condition. My field-notes and general observations of the community show that Ismailis, compared with their diet in East Africa, consume less meat presently. This trend is partially the result of the 'modern' awareness of the benefits of consuming less red meats.

Mehdi, a sixty year old widower observed:

It is now that we are eating less meats. Our Imām told us a long time ago not to consume too much meat.

The ambiguity surrounding meat consumption is expressed more intensely when we note that in spite of the awareness to 'strike a balance', meat is generously served to guests, consumed on festive occasions and brought to Jamā'āt khāna in the form of food-offerings. In order to understand this further, we need to examine the attitudes surrounding the consumption of meat.

Among the foods mentioned in the Qur^{ān}, the consumption of meat seems to pose a problem. Meat does not fall into the category of 'good' and 'pure' foods unless the name of Allah has been invoked on it (s.v:4-5). The flesh of swine, dead meat, and blood are prohibited to all Muslims (s.ii:173). In the Garden of Eden, among all the bountiful things which God provides for Adam,



there is no mention of meat. The forbidden 'tree' (according to Ismaili tradition) is wheat. The consumption of meat by man commences when men are sent to earth - a place of toil and struggle. A large part of this struggle entails the revelation and development of the spiritual in the material world. In this struggle, the image depicted by animals presents an ambiguity for man, man can be beastly or angelic.

In the creation of the universe, man is placed just one stage above the animals. While man attempts to ascend into the spiritual world, he can also descend into the world of animals, that is to say man can become like animals. In the firmāns,⁴ several references are made to the effect that if man sleeps, eats and procreates like animals, what is the difference between man and animals? Implicit in these references is the idea that man should continue to remain above the world of animals in terms of his actions and thought. Animals present an image of what man can become if he continues to remain in the material world. This is one aspect of the explanation. There is, however, another view which is equally significant. This relates to man's position as being the crown of creation. In the Qurʾān and other literary sources,⁵ man has been assigned a superior position by virtue of the fact that he is the only being through whom the spiritual can become manifest in the material world. In this respect, man can consume meat provided he does not over-indulge and thereby become too involved in material life.

At a cognitive level, meat symbolically presents two models: the first conveys the image of zanvar, that man can become like animals if the material overshadows the spiritual. The second conveys the image of man being above the animal world, and therefore able to enjoy meat. We learn from the Qurʾān that everything on earth has been created for the benefit of mankind.⁶ In



summary, meat as a core item of the solid foods symbolizes man's active involvement in the material world as conceived in the Ismaili cosmos. Nevertheless, while man can consume meat, he has to remain above the possibility of becoming like an animal. In the remaining part of the chapter, we shall continue to explore this point which has been given symbolic expression in the culinary system of the Ismailis. Before we proceed, we have yet to look at the two ingredients used in the preparation of solid foods: ghee (oil or butter are presently substitutes) and rice.



We used to get tins and tins of ghee (purified butter) in our house. I would say ghee was used for every single dish that was prepared in our house. We never used to fall sick because of ghee. Ghee contains takāt (strength) and it is saro khorāk ('good food').

The above is an extract from the conversation with Mehdi. Ghee has presently been substituted by oil, especially in the preparation of savoury dishes. Given the present awareness of cholesterol in the butter, some modifications have been introduced into Ismaili cuisine. This point will be discussed at a later stage. For our immediate purpose, the two qualities of ghee namely that of strength and 'good food', as understood traditionally, will engage our attention. Takāt is a quality that Ismailis consider as being vital for spiritual as well as material progress. Without 'strength' a person cannot take any action:

.....But Islam first and Ismailism more so insists on action; without action faith is useless; without action prayer becomes pride.

(Imam Sultan Muhammed Shah 7.5.1953).

In their everyday conversations, Ismailis commonly use the term takāt to refer to material as well as spiritual activities. A person who can perform both the activities is considered to be blessed with a lot of takāt. Women during post-natal care, people recuperating from illnesses, and elders were traditionally served with foods which contained ghee so that they might acquire renewed takāt. I learnt from conversations with informants that the quality of saro khorāk has an affective import. Saro khorāk leads to the cultivation of 'good thoughts', defined in a context enabling the spirit to reach its destination while being in the material world.

In terms of its function, there are two other qualities of ghee which can account for its traditional popularity. These are the qualities of binding



and 'purity'. Ghee (and currently oil/butter) serve to 'bind' the ingredients used in preparing a dish. In sukreet, butter is a symbol of unity, and 'binding' is significant as, in the Ismaili cosmos, all forms of creation are interrelated. This point is also forcefully expressed in terms of communal solidarity. The quality of purity is understood at a natural level. Ghee made from butter (a milk product) is pure as it is least tampered with by man.

Both the symbolic as well as the functional qualities of ghee reflect elements which are associated with spiritual life. Yet ghee is an ingredient which is used both in the light and heavy dishes and in sweet and savoury items. Traditionally, in the Ismaili culinary system, ghee forms a mediating element which symbolically effects a transformation in the two areas of material and spiritual. Ghee is both a contrary as well as a mediating element. In one context it contains qualities which are opposed to the material world, while in another it becomes part of the latter and by doing so transforms it.

Rice is the staple food of the Ismailis. It forms part of the daily diet and plays a role in 'filling up the stomach'. Rice signifies the quality of abundance and stability. When unexpected guests arrive for dinner, a common saying used is: 'put extra rice into the pan' implying that it would bring barakāt (that is, it would be enough for everyone). The element of stability is understood in the saying: 'Even if nothing else is available, at least we would have dar (grain curry) and rice to eat'. Compared with meat, rice is a simple and an inexpensive item. It is valued for the barakāt and stability which it brings.

Barakāt is a blessing sent to man by God. The translation of the term given in the Encyclopaedia of Islam is that it is a "beneficent force, of



divine origin, which causes superabundance in the physical sphere and prosperity and happiness in the psychic order" (Colin:1032). The Ismailis believe that the Imam is endowed with barakāt which can be transmitted to his followers, given right and proper conduct inclusive of qualities like honesty, integrity, sincerity and generosity. Ismailis refer to barakāt in their everyday conversations and the term seems to be confined to the material context of life: business, food and children. (In the spiritual context the term used is rahmet, meaning divine grace and mercy). The presence of barakāt can be recognized though its beneficent force cannot be explained rationally. The following example from a children's story (al-Qisās 1980:15) is illustrative.

A mother having had a long day went to school to pick up her daughter, Tasreen. After she arrived there, she remembered that she had invited Tasreen's friend Sajeeda for supper. On that day she had prepared a 'simple' meal of kitchrī (grain and rice) and yogurt. While the two girls were eating supper, having fun as they pretended that the serving of kitchrī was a mountain with snow peaks (yogurt), the mother received a phone call from her son Irfan asking if he could bring a friend, Aftab, for supper. The mother unhesitatingly gave permission, though she knew that there would not be enough food for everyone. It so happened that everyone had a number of helpings and there was still plenty to go around. Tasreen noticing the generous portions served to everyone said:

"There is so much, Mummy," she exclaimed. "It must be a magic dish!"

"Well, pet, that is what you call "Barkāt" (sic). There is always plenty when you have friends. Food served with an unselfish and true heart is always plenty when you have visitors sharing a meal," explained Mum watching happily the big mountains of kitchrī streaming away.



In the combination of meat, ghee and rice we have the symbolic presentation of status, strength, goodness, abundance and stability. We have established that solid foods primarily signify material life. But the latter includes elements such as goodness and abundance which are qualities of the spiritual. Meat signifies the polarities contained in man (man can be both an angel as well as a beast). In this respect, the culinary system of the Ismailis presents a cognitive model of material life which affirms the presence of spiritual elements. A further exploration of this contention requires that we discuss light foods which are invariably combined with solid (heavy) foods in the meal.

(ii) Light Foods.

In the first menu prepared by Rabia, three kinds of light foods are included. First, a sweet dish which is served hot (there are other kinds of 'sweets' which are served cold). Second, a savoury dish made of vegetables and served hot. Third, vegetables and fruits served raw and fresh.



Diagram 23

Types of Light Foods As Included In The Traditional Menu

Category 1	sweet	hot or cold (cooked)
Category 11	savoury	hot (cooked vegetables)
Category 111	raw (vegetables & fruit)	fresh/cold

In the Ismaili tradition, a significant amount of cultural value is attached to the serving of sweet items. All festive occasions (birth, marriage, communal celebrations) are marked by the expression: 'make your mouth sweet'. Rahemat (a seventy year widow who lives with her married son) explained:

We make our mouths sweet because we are happy. Sweet has a strong element of sharing; if we are happy, we want to share this happiness and therefore we serve it to others.

The cultural significance of sweet is affirmed by the fact that sweet dishes are not eaten as a 'meal' but are taken in small quantities as a gesture of good will. In times of difficulties, sweet items might be taken to Jamā'at Khāna as an offering, for a period of seven days. One mother observed that whenever deceased members of the family appear in dreams, a sweet dish should be taken to Jamā'at Khāna. It appears that sweet foods are associated with qualities (happiness, good will, sharing) which signify spiritual life. Significantly, these foods provide a context for elucidating the principle of contraries and mediation through which material and spiritual are complemented.



Forming a part of a 'complete' traditional meal, sweet foods add symbolically the implicit qualities of joy and happiness to an otherwise material context of eating. Characteristically, a meal commences with a sweet item. The only time when sweet food is served hot is when it is taken as part of a meal. This procedure leads to the 'blending' of the dish with the main dish which is always served hot and as we have seen represents the material form of life.

When sweet foods are taken to Jamā'āt Khāna during times of difficulties, they are commonly considered as separate and apart from savoury dishes. At this level, sweet foods stand in opposition to savoury dishes. Noorbanu (a middle-aged woman with two children) explained:

When we take sweet foods to Jamā'āt Khāna, we are supplicating that the bitterness be taken away from our lives. The bitterness can result from illnesses, lack of unity or sheer gossip. I remember that when my children were young, they had tonsils and were hospitalized at different times. During both the times, I took a sweet dish to Jamā'āt Khāna for seven days and everything went well. My children recovered very quickly.

Spirit is opposed to matter when the latter retards the spirit's ascent to its original abode. 'Bitterness', or any form of material difficulty, 'clogs and veils' the spirit which otherwise attempts to ascend, using the ladder of material life.

In contrast to meat, there is no ambiguity attached to the consumption of vegetables and fruits, both of which form part of 'the bountiful things' provided by Allah for mankind (s. ii:168, 172-73). The Ismailis categorize fruits and vegetables as being nutritious and promoters of good health. Physical health is understood in terms of a 'temple'⁸, which anchors the spirit during its sojourn on earth. Except for the salads, vegetables are well-cooked and served hot while fruits are preferred in their raw form and



are eaten 'cold'. The importance of the categorization of light foods into cooked/hot and uncooked/cold is examined below.

Before we proceed, we should note that light foods are primarily served to infants, the elders, the sick and women during their post-natal period. These are the categories of people who are least involved in material life. Light foods on their own do not constitute a meal and are never served to guests. Compared with solid foods, light foods lack the quality of 'heaviness'. In the context of a meal, (as we have observed), light foods and heavy foods complement each other, cognitively reflecting the level whereby material and spiritual engage in mutual interaction. There is one more item which further elucidates this form of interaction: unleavened bread, which is categorized as neither heavy nor light.



(iii) Unleavened Bread:

Unleavened bread falls into a special category at various levels. In terms of ingredients, it is a relatively simple dish. Apart from a pinch of salt and a little oil and water, the bread is made of whole wheat flour. Elderly informants trace this substance to have originated in the Garden of Eden where Adam was instructed by Allah to enjoy all the bountiful things except wheat. Mehdi offered the following explanation:

It is only when Adam ate the wheat that he acquired 'knowledge' of oppositions - sarū (good) and nārsu (bad).

The above view is significant in relation to the theme of this study, to examine the cultural strategies and cognitive models which form part of the heritage of the Ismailis. These formulations are in response to the basic challenge that man has accepted from Allah. In the Qurʾan, it is mentioned that among all forms of creation including heavens and earth, it is only man who accepted the challenge to carry the 'burden' of striving to achieve spiritual progress while being in the material world.

The image of wheat conveys the idea of toil and struggle that man has to go through on earth:

Verily We have created
Man into toil and struggle.

(s.xc:4).

In sūfī imagery, wheat is ground and kneaded and even mistreated until it becomes bread; similarly, the human soul can mature only through suffering (Schimmel 1975:137). As a symbol of man's position on earth, unleavened bread has the characteristic of being simple in three ways:

(a) The ingredients used are minimal - mainly flour.



(b) It is not subject to fermentation. In the Islamic tradition, fermentation carries the implication of an impurity affecting one's judgement.

(c) Unleavened bread is cooked in a special manner which is akin to the method of 'smoking'. Only an ungreased receptacle is used. In this respect, unleavened bread images the attributes of simplicity and 'purity'. Also, unleavened bread is identified as the bread of the origins. Abraham served the bread to the three messengers of God on their way to Sodom (Gen. 18:6).⁸

The cultural and symbolic value attached to unleavened bread can be judged by the fact that it is one of the most common foods served in Ismaili homes and taken to Jamā'āt Khāna in the form of Nandi. In their original homeland, it was not uncommon for Ismailis to eat the bread two or three times a day. Some women who undertake manṭa (a vow to do a certain thing for a period of time in order to fulfill a wish), take the bread to Jamā'āt khāna for a period of seven or forty days. An elderly widow who lives with her widowed daughter informed me that when her daughter was finding it difficult to get a job, she took bread and milk to Jamā'āt khāna for seven days. As a consequence, her daughter found a job.

Unleavened bread is rarely eaten by itself. It is in combination that unleavened bread has a cultural and symbolic value: it mediates the categories of heavy and light foods. Unleavened bread is served both with meat as well as with vegetable curries. It can be eaten for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, during which times it is served hot. As a snack, the bread can be eaten cold. In terms of situations, the bread can be served as part of a family meal, included in the guest menu or taken to Jamā'āt khāna.



Beyond the level of flexibility observed in relation to times and situations, the basic method employed in the preparation of unleavened bread can be extended to make sweet and savoury items. The most popular variation is that of puri and parodhā, both fried. In this form, they are categorized as heavy foods. Puri is often 'converted' into a sweet or a savoury item through the addition of sugar or spices respectively. A revealing variation of unleavened bread is samusa, pastry with a vegetable or a meat filling. Meat samusas are considered to be heavier than vegetable ones.

Preparation of samusas is instructive. The pastry dough is made with water, salt, oil and flour. The dough is then kneaded in the same way as unleavened bread. The dough is divided into small portions, and rolled into round shapes. A little oil is brushed on each piece which is then sprinkled with flour. The pieces are placed on top of each other with sprinkled parts facing each other. The number of pieces placed together are commonly even, four, six or eight. Although I was not able to establish a connection between these and the even numbers of mini-bowls arranged in the ceremony of ghat-pāt, informants revealed that even numbers are a sign of good omen.⁹ The dough pieces are then rolled into round shapes and placed on an ungreased heated pan. Through the heat, the layers (formally small pieces) are 'peeled off'. The number of layers obtained is determined by the number of rolled portions put together. The round layered pieces are then rolled into half and shaped into rectangular forms, by cutting off the end pieces. Each rectangular piece is then shaped into a triangle. This is accomplished by rolling one end half way through and bringing the other end on top. The triangle pieces are then filled with spiced cooked vegetables or meat. The peak of the triangle is then pasted to the rest of the pastry and deep-fried thereafter.

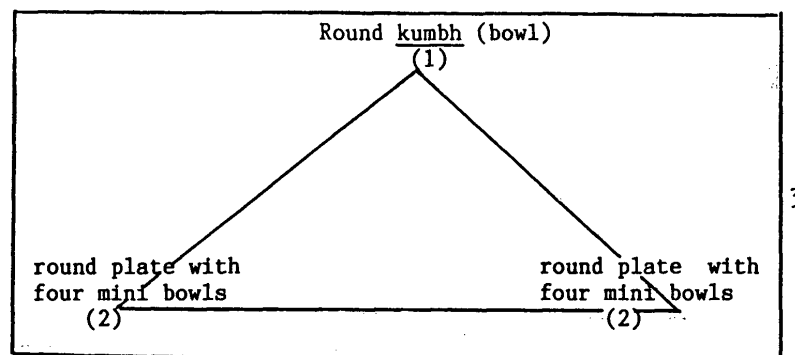


The details involved in the preparation of samusas reveal an emphasis on geometrical motifs. A 'shapeless' dough is first made into a round shape and, through a series of stages, given a rectangular form, then 'converted' into a triangle. In Islamic architecture, geometrical motifs reveal an underlying 'spiritual structure' through the principles of centrality, symmetry and rectangular forms, as we have already observed. I was unable to establish an empirical basis for direct links between geometrical forms as they appear in the articulation of enclosed space in Jamā'āt khāna and in the ritual, and the forms employed in the culinary system. Considering the grounding of the Ismaili culinary system within the cosmic order (which is the contention of this chapter), it seems that the geometrical shapes in the unleavened bread have a deeper symbolic value. So far we have already affirmed that the round shape which invariably contains a centre, symbolizes the presence of the Divine while the principle of symmetry reveals the manifestation of the sacred on the plane of becoming. We noticed that in the arrangement of the 'ghat-pāt', we have a representation of the geometrical motifs:



Diagram 24

Geometrical Motifs In The Arrangement Of Ghat-pāt



Key:

- (1) Principle of centrality
- (2) Principle of symmetry
- (3) Rectangle represented by the pāt.

As we have already observed, the triangle in the samusa is a result of a series of stages starting from a 'shapeless form' which is then made into a round form, a rectangular shape and, finally, a triangle. Although these shapes are intriguing in the context of our study, (the round shape represents the sacred, the rectangular shape represents the manifestation of the sacred, and the triangle represents the continued presence of the sacred on the plane of multiplicity), Ismaili women do not make an empirical connection of this nature. Rather, the elderly women attribute the qualities of patience, struggle, perseverance, and tolerance to the activity of cooking. Consider the following explanation given by Noorbanu:



When I got married, I was only seventeen years old. My husband had a large family. Apart from his parents, his married brother, who had two children, and his three brothers and two sisters who were unmarried lived in the same household. I used to make forty rotalis (unleavened bread) everyday besides curry, rice and a host of snacks. We used to have constant visits from guests. The women in the house helped, but there was still a lot of work in the kitchen. When I look back on it, I feel that spending so many hours cooking (though there were times when I resented it) helped me to acquire the qualities of patience and tolerance.



Sūfī and Ismaili literary thought attach considerable amount of importance to the cultivation of the qualities of patience and perseverance as they assist the soul in its journey to its homeland. We learn from the works of sūfīs that:

Only through patience does the fruit become sweet; only through patience can the seed survive the long winter and develop into grain, which in turn, brings strength to the people, who patiently wait for it to be turned into flour and bread. Patience is required to cross the endless deserts that stretch before the traveller on the Path and to cross the mountains that stand, with stone-hearted breasts, between him and his divine beloved.

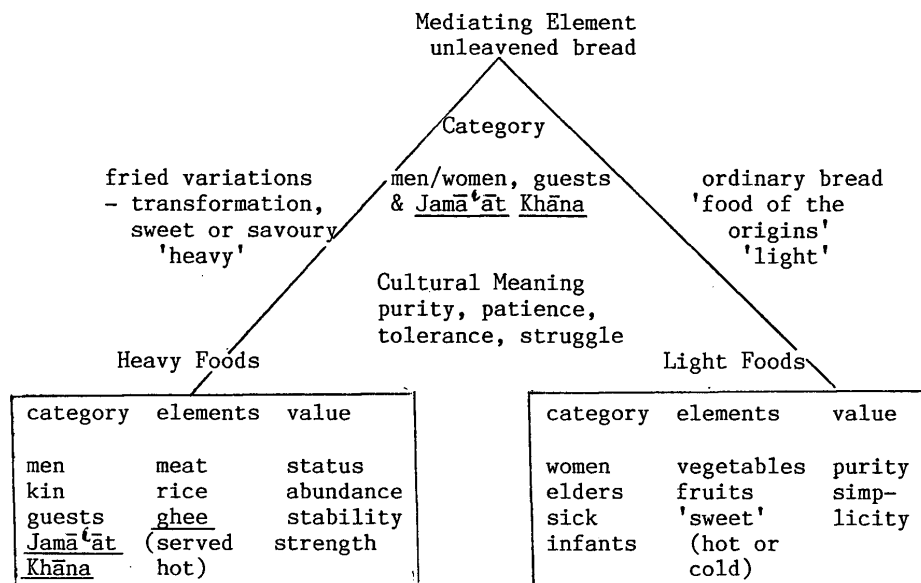
(Schimmel 1975:124)

In many respects, unleavened bread both in terms of preparation as well as symbolic value epitomizes the cosmic content. The light foods and the heavy foods are transformed through the process of interaction in the dynamics of cooking. Unleavened bread is a symbolic expression of this dynamic process as it forms part of light foods as well as heavy foods and contains elements of both. This point is illustrated in the following diagram.



Diagram 25

Unleavened Bread As Mediator Of Light And Heavy Foods.



The combination of heavy with light foods symbolically represent an interaction of elements from the material and spiritual worlds. However, the process of interaction between the two entails transformation. It seems that elements from the material and the spiritual cannot interact without departing from their raw states. One of the ways through which such a transformation is effected is through the medium of cooking. Based on this observation, I would like to submit the proposition that elements from the material world forego some of their material qualities in order to appropriate qualities from the spiritual world, and elements from the spiritual world shed their absolute state of purity and simplicity so that they may be accommodated in the material world.



The Culinary Triangle: The Raw And The Cooked

Lévi-Strauss's proposition that cooking belongs to both nature and culture and 'has as its function to ensure their articulation one with the other' is particularly illuminating (1968:489). Given the fundamental premise of Ismaili cosmology where the material is categorically different from the spiritual, the mediation process involves two levels. The first level relates to solid foods, as epitomized in the preparation of meat. The second level relates to light foods as epitomized in the preparation of vegetables which are served cooked as well as raw. The latter category also contains fruits, served raw.

When meat is cooked, the emphasis is placed on transforming the ingredient from a raw to a cooked state. While this may seem commonplace, among Ismailis half-cooked meat is subject to severe criticism. At all times, special care is taken to 'disguise' the raw form of the meat. This is accomplished through slow cooking and preparation of thick gravy (masala). We have noted the large amount of ghee (traditionally used) in the preparation of heavy foods. Ghee as a preservative not only assists in the process of transformation but maintains this state until the food is consumed. The importance of ghee can be discerned from the extra layer which floats on meat curries when the latter are served. My informants have observed that a meat curry cannot be called a curry unless there is ghee floating on the top. Nevertheless, it should be emphasised that by and large ghee was used pervasively in the past, as Kassam explained:

Things were different in the past. Our life style was different. We used to live active lives. In fact, life was nothing but struggle and hard work. I never knew or heard of relaxation that people talk so much about in this part of the world. Here there is affluence and with affluence comes a



sedentary kind of life style. Ghee is not appropriate for this kind of life style.

Light foods, as we have already seen, are considered to be relatively simple and pure. In the preparation of these dishes, minimal amounts of ingredients are used with relatively little ghee. However, when cooked they do not maintain their original simplicity. Cooking effects a transformation through the ingredients used and through heat, emphasised in the serving of hot foods. The latter is understood in two contexts both of which transform the foods from their raw to the cooked state. The foods are hot because they are cooked and also because of the addition of spices. Both processes are interrelated. The more the foods are cooked, the greater are the flavours from the spices. In both situations, hot is an attribute of material life. The spices transform the foods from their original simplicity (raw and uncooked state) while the heat in the cooking implies movement and activity which is diametrically opposed to the elements of repose and tranquillity.

From the above we can submit that it is the quality of heat which effects one form of 'interaction' between material and spiritual.

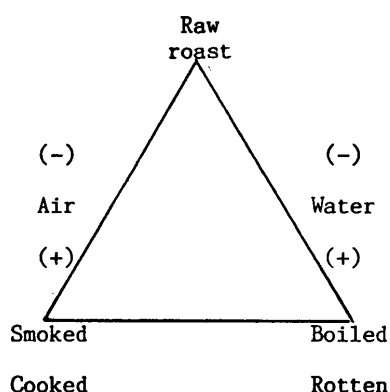
In his pioneering works on the science of mythology (1969, 1973, 1978), Lévi-Strauss identifies three basic modes of cooking. These are: boiling, roasting and smoking. Based on these modes, Lévi-Strauss constructs the culinary triangle in which the dividing line between nature and culture can be drawn in two ways. First, with respect to the means used, the modes of roasting and smoking (as no receptacle is required) are on the side of nature. Boiled is on the side of culture as through cooking it effects transformation from a raw to a cooked state. Secondly, Smoked is on the side of culture in view of the results obtained, preservation of food. By contrast, the roast and the boiled are on the side of nature¹⁰ as these suspend the natural



process of rotting. What is of interest to our analysis is that the basic modes of cooking can represent both the domains – those of nature as well as culture. In order to accomplish this, there takes place alliance as well as opposition. At one level, the roast and the smoked stand in opposition to the boiled while at a second level the smoked stands in opposition to the boiled and the roast (1968:490). The culinary triangle of Lévi-Strauss is as follows:

Diagram 26

The Culinary Triangle



The Ismaili culinary system employs three basic modes of cooking. These are 'smoking', boiling and frying. Among these, 'smoking' is done on top of the stove on an ungreased pan and is exclusively reserved for making unleavened bread. The modes of boiling and frying are utilized in the preparation of both heavy as well as light foods. Most commonly, cooked dishes commence with ghee/oil of which larger quantities are used in the preparation of heavy foods. Ghee/oil is used for the purpose of vaghār during



which time spices are added prior to the cooking of vegetables or meat. Informants related that this method retains the flavours which in the process of cooking are passed on to the main ingredient. Following the vaghār, the rest of the cooking employs boiling which is done over low heat over a period of time. Both methods transform the raw state of the food which according to Lévi-Strauss (1968), suspends the natural process of rotting.

As noted above, in Ismaili cuisine the process of transformation relates to different domains: material and spiritual. Similarly, frying and boiling belong to two different categories. Frying makes the foods heavy and fried foods are primarily served to guests, to the family (especially on festive occasions), and taken to Jamā'at khāna. Boiled foods are only served to infants, elders, and people with special dietary needs. When the methods of frying and boiling are combined in the cooking of vegetables and meat, we have yet another illustration which presents a cognitive interaction of the spiritual and the material. The principle of contraries and mediation is at work in the opposition and the combination of the two methods.



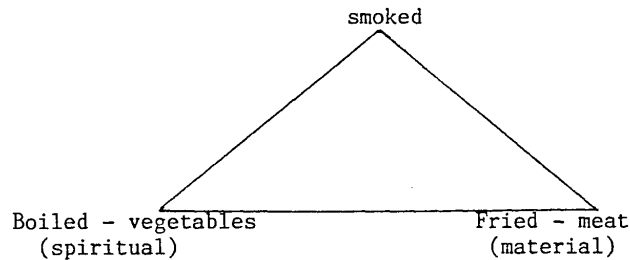
1985-09-19 -Ritual and Daily Life of Ismailis -Thesis (996)

realpatidar.com

199

Diagram 27

Principles Of Contraries And Mediation As represented In methods Of Cooking.



Meal Times

If possible, we should never eat during the time of Jamā'āt Khāna. A heavy meal and prayers just do not go together.

The above explanation offered by Nurbanu during one of our conversations takes us into considering times when meals were traditionally served in Ismaili homes. The Ismailis make a clear distinction between the time of din (when exclusive attention is given to the cultivation of spiritual life) and duniya which overtly pertains to the material world. This distinction is clearly maintained in the Qur'an, the firmāns and the gināns. The following firmān illustrates this point further:

To achieve worldly prosperity is necessary but it is more essential to excel in spiritual progress. To attend to the worldly business is incumbent but the affairs of the next world are more important than this. This should never be forgotten (sic).

(Nairobi 30.3.1945 emphasis mine).

Allah the High has fixed time for attending to worldly business. The day is for earning livelihood. Why God has created night? All night long is not for sleeping, it is also for prayers and therein lies happiness.

realpatidar.com



It is enough for a man to sleep for 6 hours, but the rest of night should be spent in prayers (sic).

(Vadhvan Camp 18.10.1903)

Within the above framework, the Ismailis classify eating as a material activity. Nevertheless, as we have observed, the Ismaili culinary system presents a symbolic model of the reflection of spiritual elements in an otherwise material context. The following is an elucidation of how this is embodied in the structuring of the meals during the day, the week and beyond that on festive occasions as well as during observance of fasting.¹¹ It should be noted that the following account is constructed through the Anthropologist's ethnographic present and essentially includes the practices which were observed traditionally.

The following is an extract of a conversation with Shahida, a housewife aged 42.

The life style over here is quite different. In East Africa, we used to have a big breakfast. I remember I used to make fried unleavened bread almost everyday; both my daughter and my husband liked it a lot. Once everybody left for school or work, I used to go to the market everyday to buy fresh fruits and vegetables. The whole morning would go by very quickly as I was busy cooking. Everybody came home for lunch. Lunch menu consisted of vegetable curry, unleavened bread, meat curry and rice. Oftentimes, we had guests - either relatives or my husband's business associates. In the afternoons, I did a little sewing and some cleaning. The children would come home from school around 4 p.m. and we would have tea and home-made snacks; I always kept snacks in the house - sometimes neighbours and relatives dropped in for tea. After tea, we would get ready to go to Jamā'āt Khāna. My husband never came home before six or six thirty. He would take a wash and have a plain cup of tea. When we returned from Jamā'āt Khāna, we would then have dinner. I did not really prepare anything special. Sometimes, we used to buy Nandi; othertimes we had something light like kadhi (made with yogurt) and khichdi (made with rice and grain). We used to eat lots of fresh fruits.

The above sample is a typical representation of meal patterns observed traditionally in Ismaili households. This pattern was confirmed by other

realpatidar.com



respondents and, as an Ismaili ethnographer, I had occasion to make similar observations in East Africa. Most commonly, the main meal of the day was consumed during lunch hour. Within the Ismaili scheme of material and spiritual, this is the time when one's involvement in the material world is at its height. The day's work is not completed and would resume in the afternoon. This was also the time when considerable amount of entertaining was carried out in the form of having invited guests for lunch. A young mother, Shahin, recalled:

When I was young, I remember a household full of people. At lunch time, we would always have somebody over.

As guests and relatives entail 'worldly ties', we can establish another context which shows the correlation between material life and midday. Interestingly, I have observed elderly Ismaili women saying a prayer at midday which points to an attempt to 'rejuvenate' spiritual life during the time when material activity reaches its height.

The structuring of the meals during the day can be understood in relation to the main midday meal which is the heaviest. The main item served during breakfast is unleavened bread which, if not prepared daily, would feature a number of times during the week. We have taken note of the elements of purity and simplicity symbolized in the item, apart from its mediating function between heavy and light foods. Breakfast is commonly eaten after the early morning prayers. Significantly, the day begins with an awareness of spiritual life. The evening snack, a light meal, is taken before Jamā'āt khāna time, a time for worship and performance of rituals. Dinner is consumed after returning from Jamā'āt khāna. This kind of spacing reflects the distinction which Ismailis make between material and spiritual life, with the implicit recognition that eating is not compatible with worship and meditation.



Ismailis, who get up for early morning prayers, do not consume any foods (except tea) until after meditation. Here, a brief period of abstention is observed, dedicated purely for the spiritual life. The point which emerges as being importantly related to the theme of this study is that in the midst of their material activity, (like that of eating), the Ismailis are cognitively reminded of the presence of spiritual qualities.

In the pattern followed for meals in Ismaili households, we can observe a system of signification which commences with spiritual awareness, reaches a heightened form in the material world and ends with light foods or absence of foods reminiscent of the spiritual. This pattern bears a close relation to the descent of man into the material world and his return to the original abode in the spiritual as depicted in Ismaili cosmology. A noticeable feature of the culinary practice is its repetition in the form of cycles. Such a repetition has a bearing on the dynamics of life whereby man is constantly struggling to remain above the material - like a waterlilly in the water.

On Sundays, a slightly different pattern is observed on account of the fact that normally this is considered to be a day of rest. Although the material activity outside the home is at its minimum, there is a greater emphasis on family and social ties. Sunday provides an occasion when kith and kin and friends get together and share a meal. On such occasions traditioanl foods comprising heavy and rich foods may be served.

Similarly, heavy foods are consumed on festive occasions many of which are religious festivals.¹¹ A striking feature of these festivals is that large quantities of foods representing a number of varieties are brought to Jamā'āt Khāna. Overtly, these festivals are religious in nature, that is to say they are meant to create a heightened awareness of the spiritual life and its

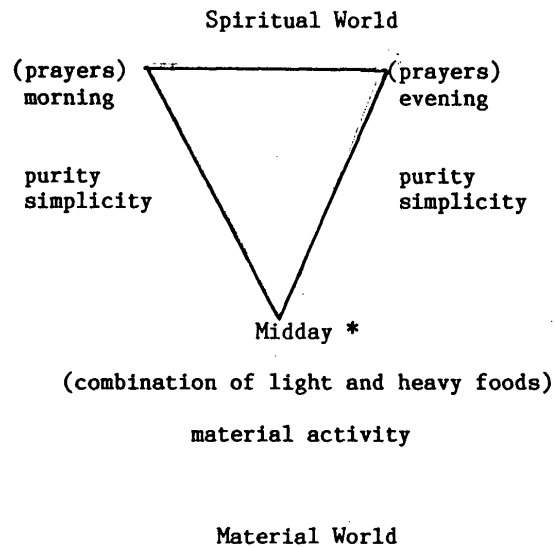


associated qualities. The overt intensity of religious life corresponding with the intense expression of elements of the material (expressed through the medium of food) seem to point to the ideal model of the convergence of the material and the spiritual. Similarly, when Ismailis observe the practice of fasting (twice a year), the fasting is broken with a traditional meal.

In the description of the meal patterns in Ismaili households there seems to emerge one underlying theme. The theme expressed is the manifestation of the spiritual in the material. The expression of this theme in the context of food incorporates a dynamic mode, forming an integral part of cooking in all societies. Part of the dynamism is effected in the transformation which cooking mediates and part of it is expressed in the repeated cycle integral to cooking. In the next chapter, we shall explore this theme further, discussing the role of Ismaili women as perceived traditionally as well as in the changing milieu dictated by living in the western world.



Diagram 28
Correlation Of Mealtimes With Material And Spiritual Worlds



* Note the mediating function of midday



Conclusion

The culinary system of the Ismailis provides a cognitive map which has a close bearing on the cosmic scheme whereby man's descent into the material world is to be accomplished by the cultivation of spiritual life. Such an undertaking would set man on a course leading to his ascent to the original homeland in the spiritual world. Ismaili rituals encode a movement from the exterior (material) world to the interior (spiritual) world personified in body imagery where the climatic symbol is that of the heart. In the culinary system this movement is observed in reverse: Food, prepared within the interior space of kitchen located inside the house, is served to family, kin and other members of the community all of whom represent the exterior material life. In other words, exterior life entailing a web of social relationships acquires meaning in relation to intense interior activity where women through the culinary system activate the model incorporating material and spiritual elements. The relationship between ritual and the culinary system is represented in the following diagram.:



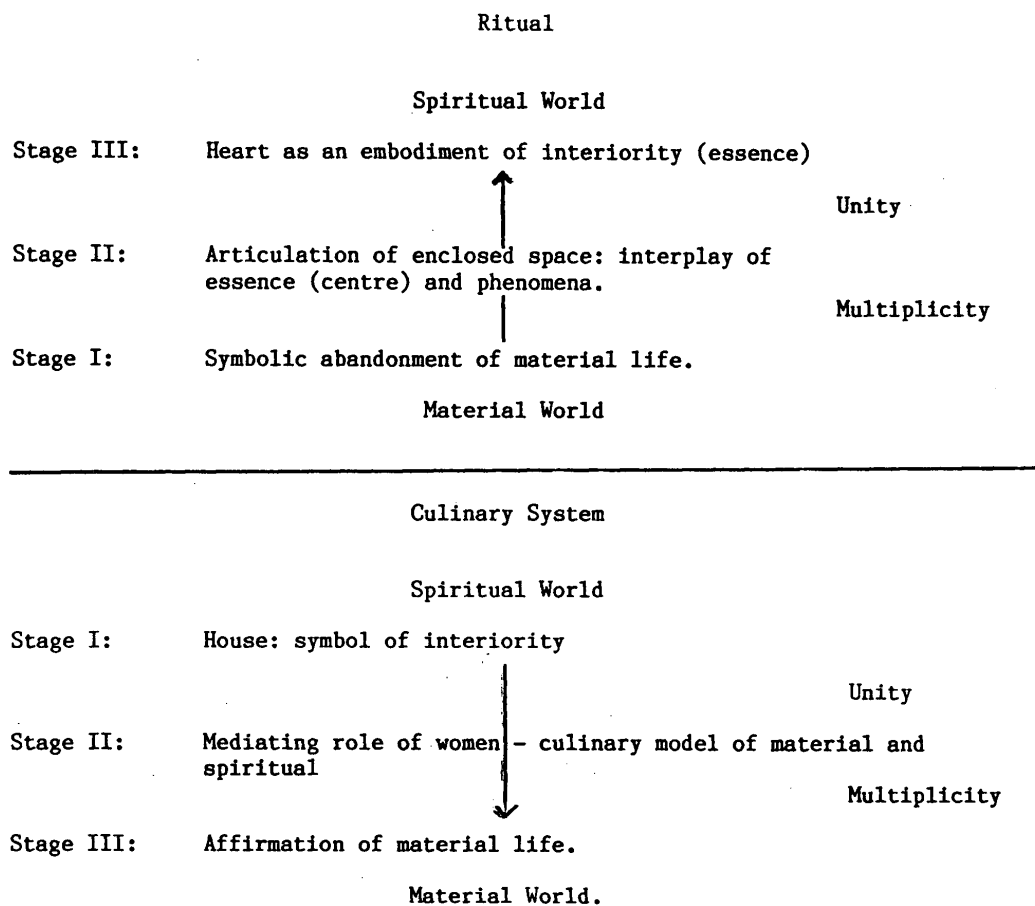
1985-09-19 -Ritual and Daily Life of Ismailis -Thesis (996)

realpatidar.com

206

Diagram 29

Cognitive Frameworks Perceived In Ritual: And The Culinary System.



realpatidar.com



Footnotes:

1. I observed that Ismaili families in Scandinavia had traditional foods more frequently than families in Vancouver; Ismailis in Scandinavia did not feel quite settled mainly because they are small in number (about 200) and therefore they seemed to cling to some of the expressive features of their tradition, like food.
2. Ghee was used traditionally. Presently, it is substituted with butter and oil.
3. Among Ismailis the term pollution is used in a specific sense; it connotes the idea of impurities imbibed in the very act of living.
4. For instance refer to Kalam e Imām e Mubin: Firmāns Of Imam Sultan Muhammed Shah, vol.1, (Bombay: Ismailia Association For India, 1951), pp.100,105,130,199,351-56.
5. Refer in particular to Nasiru'd-din Tusi, Tasawwurat, tr. W. Ivanow, (Holland: E.J. Brill, 1950).
6. Suras - lxxvii:23-24; lxxiv:12-15.
7. Imam Sultan Muhammed Shah: 28.1.1955.
8. Jean Soler: 'The Semiotics of Food in the Bible,' Food And Drink In History ed R. Forster and O. Ranum, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979) pp.126-138.
9. The only exceptions are number five and seven which are sacred numbers for the Ismailis.
10. According to Lévi-Strauss cooking mediates between the two extremes: burned meat and decomposed meat (1969:293).
11. Festivals which are most popularly celebrated are: the Imamāt Day (July 11th), The New Year's Day (March 21st), Idd al adha, Idd al fitr, the birthdays of the present Imām (Dec.13th), Imām Ali (the first Imām) and Prophet Muhammed and Mehraj (the spiritual 'journey' of the Prophet).



Chapter 7

Nurturing And Career Roles Of Ismaili Women.

Introduction

We feel that interpretation has a history and that this history is a segment of tradition itself. Interpretation does not spring from nowhere; rather one interprets in order to make explicit, to extend, and so keep alive the tradition itself, inside which one always remains. It is in this sense that the time of interpretation belongs in some way to the time of tradition. But tradition in return, even understood as the transmission of a depositum, remains a dead tradition if it is not the continual interpretation of this deposit: our 'heritage' is not a sealed package we pass from hand to hand without ever opening, but rather a treasure from which we draw by the handful and which by this very act is replenished. Every tradition lives by grace of interpretation, and it is at this price that it continues, that is, remains living.

(Paul Ricoeur 1974:27)

While all traditions thrive on the basis of interpretation, this process may be disrupted, accentuated or modified through extraneous cultural influences. Among Ismailis (like many other communities), these influences have been encountered in the form commonly known as 'the impact of the west'.¹ The first phase of this encounter took place in East Africa, the homeland of the majority of the Ismailis who presently live in Canada. The second phase, which entails adjustment to the conditions prevalent in North America, is considered by the Ismailis as crucial. The note of urgency is recognized at all levels. Consider the following views of an Ismaili scholar:

The prospect of continuing influence in our lives of a western outlook raises a host of extremely pertinent questions. First of all, it is essential to realize that the adoption of a way of life in the material sphere cannot but have consequences on one's outlook, on one's view of the world, and on one's general philosophy of life.

Furthermore, the less deliberate and selective such an adoption may happen to be, the more far-reaching its consequences on one's general outlook are bound to be. Those



who in the heyday of the modernization of the community in the past few decades, might have entertained the notion that provided we confined the changes in our lives to raising the hem-line and replacing biryani with steak and chips, our mental and spiritual lives would take care of themselves, could justly be charged with lack of realism.

Rahim, an Ismaili elder who lives with his married son observed:

In India, the elders occupied positions of authority. In East Africa, sons were in charge but here it is the women who have taken over.

Among the groups who are visibly isolated as being most affected by change are the women, the elders, and the 'youth'. In this chapter, we will explore the ramifications resulting from the changing role of women. We will commence our discussion with the traditional role of women as expounded in the Qur'an, the firmāns, and the gināns so as to determine the material and spiritual status of women. The framework which will emerge will enable us to acquire further insights into the family, the kindred, and the Jamā'at Khāna. In all these areas women have traditionally played a crucial role. Furthermore, a discussion of the emerging image of a working/career woman will reveal how Ismailis have been accommodating to change, conflict and tradition in their new milieu. Briefly, we contend that the nurturing and career roles of women entail a spatial change from a home to a working environment revealing a process of compartmentalization.



The Material And Spiritual Status Of Women As Defined In The Literary Sources.

(i) The Qur'an

Reverence God, through Whom
Ye demand your mutual (rights)
And (reverence) the wombs
(That bore you): for God
Ever watches over you.

(s.iv:1)

The metaphor of the 'womb' aptly captures the concepts of purity and cleanliness (s.ii:222-223, s.xxiv:1-24), protection (s.iv:34) and modesty (s.xxiv:30-31) through which the position of women is defined in the Qur'an. Being in the womb is a liminal phase for the human soul as it prepares to embark on its journey to an earthly life and back into the spiritual world. Before the soul enters the material world, it goes through a period of preparation which is entrusted to women. The woman's task is to nurture the human life both materially as well as spiritually. Ideally, women's activities (cooking, maintaining social ties), the qualities which they personify (patience, chastity, virtue, tolerance, and love) and the sphere in which they primarily function, the home (signifies shelter, protection), provide a symbolic and even a conceptual framework which enables the soul to ascend.

Al-Sijistānī, who played a significant role in expounding a conceptual framework of Ismaili cosmology, uses the metaphor of the womb as an analogy for explaining the cycles of Prophets. The conceptual framework formulated includes six cycles, each cycle being considered to be governed by a 'period of concealment' (dawr al-satr), when the ta'wīl (the inner reality) contained in the zāhir remains latent. Before the ta'wīl can become manifest, there



takes place a period of growth and development for mankind in the womb of history.

Growth and development in the domestic sphere are summed up in nurturing. The woman provides the 'womb' in which both the body as well as the soul can develop. In this respect, the role of the female in the Islamic/Ismaili tradition is closely related to the cultivation of the spiritual life. Therefore, both Allah and 'the womb that bore you' are to be revered (s.iv:1). The Ismailis refer to the Imām (a male) as spiritual father and mother. Implicit in the inclusion of the role of the mother is the idea that the latter will assist the soul to ascend into its spiritual abode. This idea is reiterated in the Hadīth:

Heaven lies at the feet of the mother.

(ii) The Gināns

The word ginān is a Sanskrit word, jñana, which is defined as 'contemplative or meditative knowledge' (Nanji 1972:7). The Nizari Ismailis cherish the tradition of the gināns primarily because of its affective import. The Gināns are recited congregationally in the Jamā'āt Khāna, forming an integral part of the daily performances. The ginānic references used in the text are meant to serve as illustrative examples, and no attempt has been made to give an exhaustive treatment to the richness of the images and symbols which feature vividly in the gināns.

In the gināns, the image of woman is used to portray the status of the soul living in the material world. The dilemma which faces the human soul



'pulled' in two opposite directions (material and spiritual) is expressed as follows:

Eji s̄ankadi sherī mahe mūne goor maliyā
māre lōkaṣhu vaḥēvar
Kantāni misē goorne namū
hāṭhe karū re parnām
Jene rideḥ s̄aḥo shah vase
tāku annā na bhāve
Jene rideḥ s̄aḥo Shah vase
tāku ninderā ne āave
Nindrā tajō vira bhāi
ginān vichāroo morā bhāi.

Translation:

I met my 'lord' in a narrow street
(but) I have obligatory ties with the people
I pay homage to my 'lord' on the pretext of
removing a thorn from my foot
Whoever has the Divine residing in the heart
does not like to eat food
Whoever has the Divine residing in the heart
does not like to sleep
Forsake your sleep
and reflect about truth and wisdom.

(from the Ginān: Eji tadhū tadhū mithādu bōliye)

The above verse relates an anecdote of a woman who meets her 'lord' (the Imām) on the street. However, she is not able to acknowledge his presence or pay him due respects as her relationship would not be approved by the people. The solution devised by the woman is to pretend that there is a thorn in her foot. As she bends to remove the thorn, she implicitly pays her respects to the Imām. From the refrain verse in the ginān, we learn that the pining of the soul for the 'beloved' (a term commonly used in mystical language), is so intense that the soul wishes to forsake the daily activities of sleeping and eating. The overall theme of the verse is to express the difficulty of being in the world of relationships and social ties (lokashu vahevār) and having to transcend these so that the soul can be with the beloved. This theme is



expressed through symbols and imagery which relate closely to the woman and the role, attitudes, and qualities which she personifies.

In the literature of the sūfīs³, there are a number of qualities which are emphasised as being essential for the soul if it is to achieve union with the divine. These qualities are: patience, virtue, love, perseverance, devotion, humility, and selflessness. Ideally and in the protected sphere of domestic life, women provide a model of the concrete embodiment of these qualities.

The qualities listed above, as personified in women, are illustrated in the gināns: Eji Adam āad nirinjān, Tāmaku Sadhāre soh dīn, Swāmi rājo more manthi visereji, and Amarte āyo more shāhji jo (Pirbhai G. ed. 1950:2,56,45,59). The common sufistic strand perceived in terms of a relationship between the divine and the seeker is expressed in the imagery of love and passionate longing. The intensity of the love is a response to the paradox contained in the relationship. Originally, in primordial times (adam āad), the beloved and the seeker were one. It was the time when there were neither forms nor qualities, (nirgune āpe ārup). The seeker becomes separated from the beloved and acquired a form (jud'ā padiyā thāye rup). In this state, creation, with forms and multiplicity, widens the gap between the seeker and the beloved. In the ginān, unchāre kot bahu vechanā (ibid 1950:18), this concept is explained spatially through the image of a fish. A fish (i.e. the seeker) is conceived to be in an ocean but is striving to reach a fort high up in the mountain, where its beloved resides. The spatial gap is correspondingly accompanied by time so that we learn from the ginān, Eji Adam āad nirinjān, that countless ages have gone by and the soul is still in agony 'like a fish out of the water' and a 'wife without a husband' (v.25).



In addition to space and time, the seeker and the beloved are also separated in terms of attributes and qualities. While the beloved is perfect (even to the extent of being ineffable), the seeker is imperfect (āvagun). In an attempt to bridge the gap, the seeker takes a number of steps which are imaged in terms of qualities personified by women. On the other hand, women are also depicted as morally weak. Thus in the ginān, Jire van jāra (ibid 1950:22), the nāri or wife is depicted as false: after performing the funeral ceremonies of her husband she forgets him. When I asked an elderly male informant why the metaphor of woman was used more extensively than that of male, he replied: 'There is only one nār and that is Allah', (the word nār is used for the 'husband'). The metaphor of woman developed in the ginānic literature extends to all human beings. Women are perceived to portray the two images of being 'divine-like' as well as an obstacle in the path leading to the union of the soul with the divine.⁴



(iii) The Firmāns

Times of social change are usually accompanied by reflective moments which capture decisively and emphatically the core of the 'changing' tradition. An illustrative example is provided in the firmāns, where the main categories of the material and the spiritual are defined mutually.

Remember that according to our Ismaili faith the body is the temple of God for it carries the soul that receives Divine Light. So great care of body, its health and cleanliness are to guide you in later life.....The times of prayer should not be forgotten, if you can, do go to Jamā'at khāna; if not say your tashbī (prayer) wherever you be. So keep a clean soul in a clean body.

In Islam a Moslem should have a good clean soul in a strong healthy body. We cannot order our bodies to be healthy and strong but can by constant attention, care, regular exercises and sports in our youth and early years of manhood go a long way to counteract the dangers and evils that surround us.

You must all remember the importance of a healthy soul and a healthy body. The healthy soul comes by constant realization of beauty to the Supreme Being. Your constant duty is the development of a healthy body which is the temple of God.

The above firmāns⁵ were sent by Imam Sultan Muhammed Shah in the first half of the twentieth century, when Ismailis were undergoing 'modernization'.

Essentially, this was the period when numerous forms of development pertaining to health, education and economics were being introduced through two main channels. The first consisted of direct firmāns to the Jamā'ats residing in parts of India and Africa. The second through the administrative infrastructure. The 'modernizing' elements, which were overtly practical injunctions, were incorporated within the wider framework of Ismaili traditional attitudes and values. The firmāns (1885-1950) emphasised the role of women. The Imam's main concern was to extend women's roles, largely domestic, into a wider social life. The practical injunction given was that women should acquire formal education, and over the years this point has



continued to receive considerable emphasis. The present Imām has repeatedly expressed the wish that both men and women should go into the professions.⁶

In spite of this, however, the primacy of women's role in nurturing and raising families is affirmed explicitly as well as implicitly in the firmāns. A striking image used to define the close relationship between women and children is that of the garden and the roses. Women are 'the garden' of Allah while the children are 'the roses', (Nairobi 1945). A detailed description of household tasks to be performed by women lists keeping the house clean and tidy, cooking the food, washing the clothes, and clearing the spider webs (Mombasa and Dar es Salam 1945). The overall context for the definition of the above tasks is to promote health and practise economy for the family. The distinction of roles was maintained even if women were to acquire high education:

.....if a mother is educated, she would be able to teach her children. But if the father is educated, he would be so busy in his worldly affairs that he would not be able to look after his children like an educated mother.

(Mombasa 1945)

And again:

An educated mother can look well after her child. More attention should be paid on girls as the duties of mothers are to fall upon them (sic).

(Nairobi 1937)

Although one may note a subtle shift from the mothers role to that of the parents in the firmāns of the present Imām, yet greater responsibility is entrusted to women:

Every parent should do his utmost to educate his children...

(East Pakistan 1959).



I would like those of you who are parents to continue taking interest in your children. Help them, guide them, encourage them.....

(Mombasa 1961)

.....I address myself today especially to my spiritual daughters and not my spiritual sons. My grandfather emphasised to you many a time the importance of making sure that your families live in proper surroundings, that your children are educated properly, and that as they grow up, they are instilled with proper traditions and good habits.....and I want you to remember that. It is upon my spiritual daughters that I lay the great responsibility of the development of our Jama'at and the development particularly of my very young spiritual children, the young boys and the young girls. I want my spiritual daughter to leave no stone unturned to make sure that your children are properly educated, that they are given proper surroundings in which they live, that you take good care of their health and that you instil in them from their very youngest age, ambition to improve themselves in every walk of life.

(Bombay 1967)

In his work on The Middle East, Eickelman emphasises the notion of imageability as being useful in the study of residential space (1981:273). In this context, the significance of space is measured not in terms of physical landmarks but in conceptions which are socioculturally meaningful. The sociocultural categories which emerge from the above sources point to two areas which are of direct relevance to this study. First women's distinct and traditional role of nurturing is affirmed within the wider cosmic framework. Women are not only responsible for the material well-being of their children but also for their spiritual progress. As noted above, in the Qur'an the symbol of the womb embodies the idea of growth and development of the body and the soul. The correlation of the human soul with the image of woman in the gināns symbolizes the qualities of patience, perseverance, tolerance, virtue and humility which the soul is required to cultivate, and they are also the qualities which women ideally image empirically in their domestic roles as mothers and wives. Secondly, at a material level, women are traditionally



expected to find fulfillment within a defined space: the family unit including kinship ties and the unit of the Jama'at. Both these levels are being subject to readjustment in the face of the developing trend whereby women seek to find fulfillment outside the domestic environment (i.e. in the job market) accompanied by a keen awareness of 'self' as understood in the present times. I discuss these points below.

The Emerging Role Of Ismaili Women: Domestic Life And Careers.

(i) Ethnographic Profiles.

Ismaili women are keenly aware of their traditional domestic role. All my female informants indicated that their primary duty and responsibility is to the family. While this is an expressed wish, empirically women have encountered a different situation. The following ethnographic profiles are illustrative:

Both husband and wife have to work here. I know, it would be ideal to stay at home and tend to the family. We have to provide for our children. There are so many things we have to buy for the house, for the children and for ourselves. We are not getting any younger. If we do not earn now then we will not have a comfortable life in our old age. I think that I can cope with my domestic duties. Cooking is not such a big problem. We have so many facilities here. It does not take more than an hour to cook. The main thing is cleaning up. My husband and my daughter (11 years old) often give me a hand. There are times when I do not cook much. I just make hamburgers or we go out. We go to MacDonalds once a month. We have to learn to adjust. We cannot live like East Africa here. Of course, I get tired but then I avoid extra commitments. Unless, it is compulsory, I do not work overtime. I have a nine to five job. I like to stay home in the evenings. This is my time with the children. We visit relatives during week-ends. There are so many places to visit here. If we have the money, we can live well and also give a good life to our children.

(extract of an interview with Roshan, a working mother with three children).



I am at home now. I got laid-off. I feel so bad. I was more organized when I was working. I do not think that I do any more work at home than before. Not having much to do has made me lazy. Cooking does not bother me. I find it quite simple. I am very fast and besides I enjoy it. We alternate between our foods and Canadian foods. My children (two boys aged 14 and 12) do not like our foods. They prefer to eat hamburgers and fries. I do get help from my husband and my sons. They lay the table, clear it afterwards and help me in other ways. Now that I am not working, (I have stopped looking at the moment, it is so depressing), I have lots of time. It is boring to be home. I feel so inactive.

(Zeytul is 35 years old; she used to do general office work).

As a working mother, Nimet claimed that it is possible to be both a good mother as well as a career woman:

I help my husband in business. When my children were small, I used to have flexible hours. But now I work full time. My daughter is fourteen and my son is eleven. I do not think that it is difficult to have an occupation outside home and be a good mother. Of course, I do not get much time with my children but I do my best. Sometimes when the children are not in school, I take them with me to the shop. We have a dry foods store. I do all the cooking in the house. We also manage to go to Jamā'at khāna two or three times a week. Family, work and Jamā'at khāna, these are the areas which are important to me. As far as relatives are concerned, we keep in touch. We visit them and they visit us occasionally. I meet quite a few of the relatives and my friends in Jamā'at khāna.

The above profiles reveal the role of women in terms of tradition and change. By and large, the tasks of cooking, raising the children, and instilling Ismaili traditions and way of life, and also providing moral and, of late, financial support to the family, are performed by women. Secondly, Ismaili women have also opted for an occupational life outside home. One of the strong reasons cited for women going to work is economic necessity. A common expression heard in the conversations is: 'It is not possible to "survive" on one salary'. An inventory of the 'survival needs' include:

- (i) kitchen gadgets
- (ii) household items, furniture, video, T.V.



- (iii) education for children
- (iv) recreation and travel
- (v) clothing
- (vi) car(s)
- (vii) house
- (viii) groceries

The overall material orientation of the Ismailis in their new homeland is to secure a comfortable living for their families. The securing of such a 'comfort zone' includes items which, forming an integral part of North American life such as video, microwave ovens, fit into the wider structure of an acquisitive society. Women who decide to stay at home by and large belong to the high income bracket (\$40,000) which their husbands secure for the family. The only other category of women who pursue a domestic life are those who, because of age (over fifty) or a young family, have opted to stay at home.

However, there is another factor which seems to have affected women's attitude towards home and work life. Sahbanu who has two children, aged six and four, is now working after having stayed at home for three years. She described her experiences as follows:

I do not think that I shall ever stay at home. I know the children needed me and I got some satisfaction that I was around. But I found it boring to be home. All that I was doing was taking my children to places - parks, activities, cooking and keeping the house clean. I did not get any time to myself. I felt that I could not even converse with others apart from exchanging notes on children. It gives me a nice feeling to come out of the house. At least I can dress up and feel important.

Nashrin, with one child (three years) related that:

I have to get out of the house by myself. I go to keep-fit classes and am attending an evening course in psychology. Sometimes I find it stifling to be home. It is the same old routine - nothing to look forward to.



Other mothers who are at home have found outlets in the form of recreation activities, studies or part-time work and voluntary work with community institutions. One mother summed it up:

I need to do something for myself.

Given the situational factors and attitudinal change, it is instructive to see how women have accommodated their emerging role as career women. Ismaili women have adopted a number of strategies enabling them to maintain part of their traditional role. Taking the example of cooking, a number of women explained to me that traditional foods were cooked because: (a) they were economical and satisfying to eat and (b) they were appropriate for entertaining guests and for food offerings (Nandi). In the cooking of traditional foods, the women have adopted the devices of making advanced preparations so that half the cooking is done early in the morning and the rest in the evening, cooking in bulk and freezing part of it, placing orders from women who are at home (a common dish purchased is unleavened bread), obtaining food by means of Nandi, and seeking assistance from other members of the family. In this way the cognitive model embodied in Ismaili cooking is maintained though this model is alternated with other foods.

The reasons cited for the preparation of traditional/Canadian foods or simply Canadian foods were that these were relatively 'simple' (meaning less labour-intensive) to prepare, were preferred by children, and that traditional foods would be too heavy if consumed everyday. Although some families just ate traditional foods, I did not come across a single family who ate solely Canadian foods. While the cooking of Canadian or a blending of Canadian/traditional foods may be an adaptive strategy in terms of time, the practice reflects experiences which significantly express the way of life in



the new milieu. One of the common expressions I came across in the field is: 'Life is pressurized and time is precious.' By implication, if non-traditional foods make life easier for women, they should be adopted. However, in many respects, these foods serve to accommodate the food preferences of the younger generation. Farida explained:

If I did not cook spaghetti, pizza or hamburgers and chips at least three times a week, my children would say, I am not fair because I only cook what daddy likes.

Of great importance is that non-traditional foods, especially the 'Canadian Foods' as the Ismailis know them, are the stock in trade of chain restaurants: MacDonalds, White Spot, Pizza Parlors and Chinese restaurants. These are the foods which are popularly consumed by the masses and find their way into the advertisement columns of the mass media. Generally speaking, I learned from my informants that Ismaili women had not been exposed to that part of the Canadian cuisine which undoubtedly could also be labour-intensive. Roland Barthes' comparison of traditional and modern foods is revealing. In his study of the French society, Barthes shows that 'modern' foods embody elements of power and aggressiveness while traditional foods are linked to moral values, wisdom and 'purity'(1975:166-173). Various studies on Food have affirmed that food symbolizes and expresses the way in which a person experiences his 'social environment'. For instance Barthes argues that an entire "world" is present in and signified by food (1975:170). In an illustrative study of a meal, Douglas shows that food categories encode social events to the extent that a meal contains "symbolic structures" which are present in the wider social system (1972:61-81). At this level, the non-traditional foods consumed by Ismailis signify the way in which they experience life in Canada. By preparing these foods, Ismaili women are attempting to accommodate a 'modern form of life' (expressed by Ismailis in



realpatidar.com

223

terms of 'pressure' and 'time'), contain potential conflict (preferences of the younger members as opposed to adults and also elders), and respond to the new life style which, according to the informants, does not promote the consumption of 'heavy' (traditional foods).

Pressure and time are the primary terms through which Ismailis expressed their experiences in their new homeland. By and large, these experiences lead to confinement of space as elders, men, women and the youth confirmed that here there is no time to do everything. This meant that activities which were considered to be important, like entertaining kin, have been condensed. A male informant explained:

Here one does not even have time to interact with one's family members. How is it possible to meet all the obligations regarding relatives? My uncle was in the hospital for two months. I could only visit him once. I feel guilty but I cannot help it.

Nevertheless traditional foods (as opposed to fast foods of the present day and age) are consumed because they bring 'satisfaction' and barakāt. They accommodate the interests of the elders and the adults and, most importantly, they embody the cognitive model as expounded in the last chapter. Empirically for Ismailis, traditional foods evoke memories of their homeland.

This is how my mother used to cook it.

These memories are the repositories of traditions while non-traditional foods signify a process of adjustment. Table IV refers to the number of times the three categories of food: traditional, non-traditional and traditional/Euro-Canadian foods are eaten in Ismaili homes over a period of one week. However, it should be noted that while traditionally the 'interior' activity of cooking was cojoined to the exterior world of social relationships providing one spatial category for women, the latter now move in two separate spaces: home

realpatidar.com



and work. I explore this point further in relation to kinship and career
roles of women.



Table IV

Dietary Habits Of Ismailis*

	No of Households = 15 Period observed: one week														Total
Core Traditional Foods	7	3	4	3	5	2	3	4	5	2	2	7	3	4	57
curry & rice															
unleavened bread															
fried dishes															
variations of															
the above.															
Non-Traditional Foods	0	2	1	0	0	1	2	3	0	0	1	0	2	0	12
fish & chips															
hamburgers															
spaghetti															
Chinese foods															
pizza															
variations of the															
above.															
Traditional/Euro-Canadian Foods	0	2	2	4	2	4	2	0	2	5	4	0	2	3	36
roast chicken															
grilled fish															
turkey/roast beef															
(these dishes are taken															
with traditional spices															
and vegetables)															

* Foods mentioned refer to the main meal consumed in the evenings.
Data for this table was collected during interviews and observations.



(ii) Kinship Ties

Among Ismailis, kinship provides the hub around which their material life is organized. Characteristically, material life entails a web of relationships (kutumb pariwar) which may entangle the soul further in the compounded world of activity. One of the manifest and visible form in which this was traditionally expressed was in cooking. Women who remained at home (this category of women are now fifty years old), spent a great deal of time catering for kin, especially those by marriage. Life histories of house-wives in East Africa repeatedly highlight the theme of their total involvement in preparing food for kin:

When I got married, we were twelve people in the house. Apart from my father in-law, my husband's three brothers, and three sisters were all living together in one house. I used to make forty five rotalis (bread). My sisters-in-laws would help but I was responsible for all the cooking. There was a lot of work in the house; I never thought that things could be otherwise.

(extract of an interview with Fatma who presently lives alone with her husband).

The extended family system had a further component. This consisted of a constant flow of visiting relatives who, in most cases, stayed for a meal. In the case of Fatma, her father-in-law, or mother-in-law, brothers and sisters would come over quite often. On festive or family occasions the whole family, that is, relatives living in separate dwellings, would be invited for a meal. During these times, blood relatives of the female spouse would also be included. Ismailis in Vancouver (and also in Europe) reminisce of their days in Africa in terms of family gatherings when a variety of traditional foods were eaten. However, my informants were quick in saying:

Those days are gone. Who has the time here? We barely manage to keep our lives together.



In spite of the constant reference to lack of time, kinship relations are still maintained and partially expressed through cooking. Undoubtedly, the extended family system is no longer maintained. The developing trend is towards nuclear family of parents and children. In some cases, the parents of a married son stay in the same household, but this is mainly due to circumstances when mutually convenient. It appears that the only time a son is obliged to keep his parents is when one of them has died: the other one is 'taken in'. The attitude of married couples towards the parents of the male is ambivalent. My informants were clear that the presence of the parents would be a source of tension in the house. Some of the reasons were identified as follows:

(a) Parents being at home the whole day would like to go to Jamā'āt khāna everyday. They would require the son or daughter in-law to take them as very few of them drive. The son/daughter in-law would find this impractical (on a daily basis) as both of them having been out working the whole day would prefer to 'relax' at home.

(b) There would be clashes in terms of food preferences. The parents would find it difficult to consume Canadian foods - at least they do not take to all kinds. A young daughter in-law said to me: 'Sometimes I am tired and I do not feel like cooking. I would prefer to order Pizza. I cannot do this if my in-laws are staying with us'.

(c) One couple expressed the point: 'When we entertain, it is difficult to have parents around. Our friends would find it hard to relate to them'.

(d) 'If my mother in-law stayed with us, I would find it difficult. She would expect me to keep the kitchen spotlessly clean. I don't think I



can do that. Sometimes, I just want to keep my feet up and relax. I do not like to be told what to do'.

The above is not exhaustive but indicates a trend emphasising the nuclear type of family life. The parents have their own story to tell. One couple related:

We would not like to live with our son. These days daughter's in-law (vahu) work and we would not like to live a subdued life. Because the daughter-in-law brings money, she becomes the ruler in the house. We would like to maintain our respect.

A second couple expressed the view:

These days children do not understand. We had such hopes - but the situation has changed. We do not know whom to blame. If the children understand, then everything would be all right. Everybody wants independence. When people come to Canada, they change.

In spite of the reservations expressed by married sons and their wives about maintaining the parents, very close ties are sustained in terms of regular visits, phone calls, gift exchanges, assistance, eating together and meetings in Jamā'at khāna. In some cases, parents and a married son live in two adjoining dwellings. In many instances, married daughters maintain very close ties with members of the natal family - parents, brothers and sisters. Besides this, ties may also be maintained or even cultivated with other members of the kin who may include uncles, aunts and cousins. Looking at the guests invited and entertained for meals, I noticed that over sixty percent of my informants included kin relations. There are a number of factors which explain why such ties are sustained in spite of the pressure of time experienced by Ismaili families. The reasons are:

- (a) It did not take too long for Ismaili emigrants to realize that 'Canadians do not entertain'⁷ to the same degree and manner that the Ismailis were used to in their original homeland. A number of my



informants related that when they first came to Canada, they started to invite the neighbours for a meal or for tea. Such invitations were not reciprocated and therefore the attempt to cultivate relationships through the medium of food did not come to fruition.

(b) It appears that kinship ties are maintained for reasons of stability and security. The realization of being exposed to a new and foreign culture points towards kin relations as a source of strength, both during times of crisis as well as otherwise. However, relations are not maintained with all kin. There is a process of selection at work and ties are strongest whenever mutual advantages are to be gained, for instance if two families have children of the same age. The selection of 'priority kin' gives us further insight into the operative principle of condensation as noted earlier. In the case of ritual, the step omitted was that of ritual cleansing of ghat-pāt with water. In the case of kinship, greater contact is maintained with the selected few, whereby others are excluded.

The frequency of contact maintained with the priority kin throws into relief an ambivalent attitude. On the one hand, informants expressed the wish that kinship ties are important as, apart from material advantages, such ties can enable one to express spiritual qualities in the midst of material life. These qualities come into play in various situations among which caring for the elderly parents was recognized as being primary. If a son looks after his parents, he acquires their blessings which will lead to material prosperity as well as spiritual advancement of the soul. A daughter-in-law who cooks for the elderly parents is performing seva (service) which is equated with prayers (bandagi). Likewise, to help kin relations in times of crisis is considered



to be a religious duty (faraz). My data show that these dictums are not followed at all times but provide the incentive for maintaining certain traditional qualities like duty and obligation.

On the other hand, kin ties are also considered to be a hindrance.

Shahbanu, a working mother said:

Whenever I have relatives for a meal I have to spend three days making preparations. The first day, I have to shop. The second day is spent in cooking, and the third day I am still washing up and cleaning the house.

In spite of the above reservation, Shahbanu continued to invite relatives once or twice a month. The reason: 'It is our duty'.

The ambivalent attitude towards kin seems to give expression to two major incompatible needs. The first pertains to the basic Ismaili mode of life which entails being in the material world which at the same provides an opportunity for the cultivation of spiritual qualities. The second need is a recent phenomenon. It has emerged in response to the Canadian milieu where there is a greater emphasis on 'individualism'. This development seems to be incompatible with the web of relationships which kinship ties entail.

The question is: Would an individualistic attitude towards life leave any room for the cultivation of spiritual qualities? Unless Ismailis are able to experience the 'spiritual' in the midst of material life, they will not be able to maintain their traditions meaningfully in the new environment. The categories of material and spiritual traditionally form an integral part of their lives both conceptually as well as symbolically. Involvement in kinship relations has made it possible to maintain the qualities of material and spiritual within one framework. One instance where this can be observed is during times of crisis. Among Ismailis, the 'times of crisis', collectively



recognized, are sickness and death. These are the times when all kin and other members of the community gather in the house of the afflicted family. Significantly, these are the only times when no food (except for a cup of tea) is served. This is an instance which reveals the spiritual qualities, given that the context of kin involves relationships which are material in nature. The spiritual qualities which come into play are those of simplicity, and the general attitude of kin to offer consolation and help. In Islam, these actions benefit the soul of the giver.

The attitude of Ismailis towards kinship ties has also found expression in attendance in Jamā'at khāna. By and large, Jamā'at khāna entails an interactive process whereby one identifies with the others (the kin, members of the community and the Divine). In East Africa, going to Jamā'at khāna was a daily occurrence for many families. A significant change is that among some what was once an ordinary activity has become a special occasion. As in the case of kinship, Ismailis recognize the importance of 'going to khane' but for some, it will continue to remain a special activity.



(iii) Career Role Of Ismaili Women.

Many Ismaili women have joined the work force out of economic necessity and in some cases out of the need for self expression outside the domestic life. While the roles of women have extended into the material world, they have continued to give priority to their nurturing role in the family. Women have accommodated the occupational activity in two ways. The first one through the utilization of resources: organization of domestic life along western notions of time and space,⁸ usage of household appliances (most of which include modern devices), assistance from family members, and seeking institutional care for their young children. The second aspect concerns condensation of domestic life to the extent that relations are maintained only with priority kin. Condensation of activity and social ties entails a corresponding narrowing of space. Traditionally, an Ismaili household was an 'open space' where relatives, friends, and neighbours could drop in informally without prior notice. Presently, visiting is formal, arranged beforehand, and confined to a special (as opposed to everyday) event. The occupations of Ismaili women are given in Table V. Except for the women who are in the professional fields or running bussiness concerns, most of the women in other sectors expressed dissatisfaction in their work.



Table V
Career Occupations Of Ismaili Women.

No. of respondents = 50			
	Ages		
	22-35 (N=25)	36-50 (N=25)	Total
Occupations			
clerical	4	8	12
Technical	5	2	07
Professional	5	1	06
Manual	2	7	09
Business	3	3	06
Housewives	6	4	10



Of interest in the above table is the observation that proportionally a large number of Ismaili women (82 %) have opted to work outside home. Zarina a day care teacher explained:

I like children but I would not like to be with my own children the whole day. It is satisfying to work outside home. I think people respect you more if you have an occupation. It would be ideal to have a part time job so that I can be with my children half day.

Given the fact that family and work life are distinctly separated in North America, one may expect to find potential conflict between the two roles of women: nurturing and career. Among Ismaili women the conflict of roles is manifested spatially. The traditional role of women expressed primarily in the interior space of home life has given way to a life style of alternation. Ismaili women oscillate between family life and careers. Family life has been considerably condensed in order to accommodate the working/career roles of women. On the other hand, the working lives of women are conceived to be relatively confined in the sense that they have no bearing on the home life other than being instrumental in securing material comforts. These points are illustrated by women relating their predicaments in their new homeland. The following views expressed by Shila (mother of two children, aged twelve and fifteen) and Nevin (mother of one, aged six) respectively were shared by others.

Many of us (women) work because of economic necessity. I work in the bank. At first I was a teller. I worked my way up and now I am a supervisor. Frankly, I find my work boring. It is the same old routine and I have nothing to look forward to. Ideally, I would like to go to college and take up something interesting. When I come home I am too tired to spend much time with my children. I do my best but there is a limit. I feel that I am neither here nor there; I do not get a sense of fulfillment. I feel that I am not fulfilling my responsibility as a mother but neither am I achieving much at work. Here in Canada work is doing your job right - there is nothing beyond that.

Nevin



Nevin:

I like to work. I am not the kind of mother who can stay at home. Although my work is interesting (accounting clerk), I feel that people here are not very friendly. Apart from the surface interaction in the office, people are not interested in becoming your friends. I feel quite confined. I worked hard and worked my way up but I still feel that something is lacking and that is social interaction. You eat your own lunch and do your job, that is all that really counts. I have considered the possibility of staying at home but again I would not like to be confined - neighbours are strangers.

In Vancouver (but not in country towns) neighbours come and go and are 'accidental' owing to the mobility integral to the modern industrialized market system. In East Africa, kith (neighbours) were probably also kin.

The predicament of Ismaili women is revealed by the fact that they feel confined both at home as well as at work. Their traditional domestic role of nurturing had two forms of expression which were interrelated: material world of social relationships, and the spiritual world, spatially conceived to be imaged in the Jamā'at Khāna. Women acted as mediators between the material and the spiritual. By occupying an interior space (at home where the kitchen is spatially in the interior, private and exclusive area) women imaged a movement out into the exterior material world of kinship ties and obligations and a movement into the interior spiritual world imaged in the qualities which women personify.⁹ As we have observed, this movement into the exterior world and the interior world is symbolically expressed in the culinary system; in an Ismaili home foods are prepared to cater for social groups as well as for Jamā'at Khāna. Although women have attempted to maintain their nurturing roles, (I did not come across a single respondent who said that she would put her career before the family) a process of compartmentalization seems to have emerged. The compartmentalization between the traditional life of women and work can be identified as follows:¹⁰



Diagram 30

**Compartmentalization Between The Traditional Life Of Women
And Salaried Work.**

Home (traditional setting)	Work
Group oriented	Individualistic
Co-operation	Competition
Holistic	Performance-oriented
Affective	Calculating
Open space	Close space.

In the following chapter, we shall continue to expound this theme in relation to the life cycle of individuals.



Footnotes:

1. For further information refer to: Satpanth Ismailis And Modern Changes Within It, With Special Reference To East Africa, Esmail A, (Edinburgh University: Ph.d. dissertation, 1972).
2. Esmail A. 'Ismailis And The Western World: Prospects And Predicaments,' Hikmat Vol.I, No.3. (1976), pp.20-23.
3. In the literature of the sūfis, women personify the qualities which advance the soul towards its eternal abode as exemplified in the common saying: 'Paradise is under the feet of mothers', Jalāluddīn Rūmī, (1968:55). Note that specific reference is made to women in their roles as mothers.
4. A useful summary of the concept of women perceived in sūfi literature is found in A. Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions Of Islam, (1975), pp. 426-435. In sum, the concept of women as formulated by sufism is ambivalent: women are equated with piety and virtue on the one hand and with the lower soul (the world and its temptations) on the other. Among those who represent the image of the ideal pious women are Rabia al-'Adawiyya (the first true saint of Islam), Fatima of Nishapur and Mary (Maryam) 'the immaculate mother who gave birth to the spiritual child Jesus' (ibid:429). These women epitomize the qualities of spiritual love, purity, untiring faith, divine beauty, tenderness and yearning for the divine.

The qualities of the lower soul are imaged in women to represent worldly temptations which ensnare the soul, making union with the divine impossible. In this respect, women are considered to bring about the fall of mankind though Schimmel emphasises the point:

....the Muslims scarcely reached the apogee of hatred displayed by medieval Christian writers in their condemnation of the feminine element. Eve was never responsible for the fall of Adam, and the often repeated Christian accusation that "woman has no soul according to Islam" has no basis in the Koran or in the classical tradition (ibid:429).

5. 'Precious Pearls,' June 1954, pp.55-56.
6. The concept of education in the firmāns is expounded within a broader framework which includes moral, ethical and religious issues.
7. Note that the reference to 'Canadian Way of Life', in this study, is according to the manner in which the informants have described and experienced it.
8. These notions are explicated in the concluding chapter of this study.
9. Specially significant are the qualities of sacrifice, perseverance and patience which we observed in our discussion of the literary sources in the beginning of this chapter.



1985-09-19 -Ritual and Daily Life of Ismailis -Thesis (996)

realpatidar.com

238

10. It should be noted that women in East Africa had careers outside home; I learnt from the informants that home and work continued to have a complementary relationship and by and large women did not experience the conflicts and pressures that they say have affected thier lives in Canada.

realpatidar.com



Chapter 8

Continuity And Change : Life Histories Of Ismaili Elders, Adults And "Youth"

Introduction

.....the life history is still the most cognitively rich and humanly understandable way of getting at an inner view of culture. (No other type of study) can equal the life history in demonstrating what the native himself considers to be important in his own experience and how he thinks and feels about that experience (Phillips 1973:201).¹

In the last chapter, we noted the process of compartmentalization emergent through the attempt of women to accommodate career life into their traditional role of nurturing. A second context where this process can be observed is that of life histories. Among Ismailis life history embodies a cognitive model of material and spiritual life. Traditionally, the two categories which are of importance are adults and elders. While adults pursue material life more vigorously, the elders are more active in the cultivation of spiritual life. In other words, the adults image a spatial and temporal form related to activity and multiplicity, while the elders personify the qualities of unity and repose. In this chapter, I show that the cognitive model is being disrupted as the mutual relationship between the elders and adults is being affected by the modern notion of individualism. Furthermore, the category of youth has emerged as a distinct group owing to the 'modernization' of the community in two phases: first in East Africa, and the second in the new environment of the Ismailis in Vancouver. The relationship between the elders, the adults, and the youth is explicated in terms of time and space. Essentially, I show that this relationship can be understood in terms of different kinds of temporal and spatial experiences of the elders, the adults, and the youth.²



This chapter is divided into two parts. We shall first relate and analyse the accounts of the lives as narrated by the informants. Out of twenty five life histories, twelve have been included here as it would not be feasible to give room to all. The second part focuses on the understanding and experiences of the elders, the adults and the youth in relation to the host society.

Life Histories

(i) The Elders³

Kassam is a widower who emigrated to Canada from Tanzania in 1974. Presently, he lives with his son and daughter in-law and two grand daughters aged nine and six. The following is the narrative as he related it to me in Gujerāti.

I was born in Dar-es-Salaam in 1906. We were eleven in the house. I am the second youngest among six brothers and three sisters. My first memories of childhood are those of World War 1. I was only nine years old. For the next four years there was continuous bombardment. I remember that there was a Jamā'at of 500 people; sometimes we used to stay in the Jamā'at khāna - I guess we felt safer there. I studied seven classes of Gujerāti and three classes of English. While schooling, I used to help my father in the shop. We had a store where we used to sell cigarettes, matches, rice and salt.

When I left school in 1922, my father made arrangements for me to work in the 'Standard Bank of South Africa'. This is because it was the Imām's firmān that young boys should work and acquire experience prior to joining the family business. I worked in the bank for five years. Even to-day, I am good at Arithmetics. These days when people want to calculate 18+28, they turn to the machine. I can do it in my head.

I got married when I was nineteen; it was an arranged marriage 'fixed up' by family members. Until 1974 I worked in our shop. The hours were long, 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. Life was hard, but we were happy. There was always a lot of activity. My



uncles and aunts lived close by. We had very close ties with relatives, friends. Until I came here, I never knew what loneliness was like. I lost my wife just prior to coming here. We have seven children, five boys and two daughters. Three of my sons are here. Everyone is busy so I have tried to make my own life here. It is difficult to pass time but then we get used to it. I follow a routine. When everyone has left for work, I have breakfast by myself. Then I go out. Sometimes I go to a mall and look for bargains. The other day I picked up apples which were on special at Woodward's.

I am a member of the Senior Citizens club (Ismaili organization); I help out with accounts. I also like to go for walks. I have my lunch at 12 p.m. and after that I take a nap. I go out again for a little while but I always come back by three as the children come home from school. They play on their own but I keep an eye on them. Oftentimes, I teach them du'a (prayers) and gināns. By five, my son and daughter in-law come home and then we have our dinner around six. Soon after, I get ready to go to Jamā'at khāna. I go to Jamā'at khāna everyday in the mornings and evenings - transportation is provided by the community. When I talk to other people, I feel less lonely. After all our community is like a family. Life would be very difficult without Jamā'at khāna.

Visram, originally from Uganda, has lived in Vancouver for the past twelve years. He lives with his wife in a house and the following account was related in English.

I was born in 1924 in a large family. I am the youngest among four brothers and two sisters. Until 1948, we all (my brothers and their wives and children) lived together. There are bound to be conflicts but these conflicts were kept under control. The wives took turns in cooking but the most important factor was authority. No one would question my father's decision. Whatever he said was accepted as final. We had a shop like many other Ismailis but my father wanted me to get the highest level of education available at the time. After my primary school, my father sent me to India to study in the Muslim Boarding school. I remember there was very strict discipline. If we did not get up for prayers at six, we would not get any breakfast. I studied until I finished Senior Cambridge (High School). By this time, the family business had expanded to incorporate other fields like the export/import trade.

Apart from my involvement in business, I was active in communal institutions like education, administration, and the Ismailia Association. I also took an active part in public life and had good contacts with the government.



I have five daughters and one son and of course I wanted them to acquire good education. My policy was that they should complete Senior Cambridge at home and then they should pursue further studies abroad (London). Many parents used to come and ask me if this was the right step as there was always the fear that they would get 'spoilt' in London. My response was: 'If they are going to get spoilt, they would get spoilt here too.' If the children had a good family life and social background, they would understand their responsibilities.

Since coming here, I have not been actively involved in communal institutions. If they need help, I am always available. At present, there is a lot of emphasis on 'youth'. I think that the youth and the elders should work hand in hand. After all they should realize that there is one thing that we elders have and that is time. We can do a lot of groundwork for communal projects. We also have the experience. I do not know how much value is attached to it today.

Here things are different. People have to work hard, they get tired. Our only safeguard is going to Jamā'at Khāna. People's lifestyle has changed; their thinking has changed. Change has affected everybody. We need two things to survive here. One is money and the other is Jamā'at Khāna. As for my children, I think that we brought them up in a satisfactory manner. We gave them the necessary education. They are all well settled; we do not interfere with their lives but they know and I have always told them that we are here to help them if they need us.

Roshan, originally from Kenya, lives with her son and daughter in-law who have two children aged seventeen and twenty. She is a widow and her narration took place in Gujarati.

I was only sixteen when I got married. I got married in India and soon after (in 1932) my first child was born. All of us lived in one household: my father in-law, my mother in-law, my brother in-law, his wife and their four children. My sister in-law and myself did all the cooking in the house. There was a lot of work, the children, the cooking, cleaning, guests. It was not until 1948 that we left for Africa; my brother in-law had left earlier but we stayed on because my mother in-law was not keeping well. In India we had a retail store and my husband joined his brother in running a fabric store when we moved to Kenya.

I had five children altogether out of which two died in their infancy. For us women, life meant cooking and being in the house but it also meant a lot of social interaction. There would be people in the house all the time - guests,



neighbours, kin, and the children just grew up. There was always somebody to take care of them. We gave our children the education which they desired and we tried to give them religion. I used to insist that we all go to Jamā'āt khāna everyday. If we give our children good habits and faith, they will go a long way.

As for my life here, I am happy and contented. I do not come in anyone's way. I never come down for breakfast until everyone else has left. After breakfast, I do the laundry or some cleaning. Then I am free. I watch T.V. for two hours. Before lunch, I say my tashbi (prayers) around 12 p.m. This is one of the habits I developed when my son was very sick. In the afternoon, I cook curry, rice and unleavened bread everyday. This is because my son and myself like our foods. My daughter in-law makes 'English' foods for the children. By the time I have cleaned up and had my bath, family members come home. We have dinner around six and then I get ready and go to Jamā'āt Khāna everyday. The only times I miss is when we have guests. There is one Ismaili family in the neighbourhood that goes to Khāne everyday so I am never stuck for a ride. I have the peace of mind. I am not worried about anything. Naturally, when we live together, there are bound to be disputes. We have to learn to be tolerant but here, it is the elders who have to give in the most. I think that when I go to Jamā'āt khāna, I leave the world behind me.

Shirin is a widow. Originally from Uganda, she lives by herself in an apartment.

I lost my husband when my children were very young. My son was only seven and my daughter four. We had a retail shop. I continued running the business with the help of my brother in-law. My mother used to help me and I think it was she who practically raised the children. My son did not study much. After high school, he felt obliged to help me run the store. Presently he is married with two children and lives in California. My daughter is working in a bank and she lives in Vancouver. I look after her three year old son and that is good for me - at least I can pass my time.

I myself did not study much. My father withdrew me from school when a male teacher took over. My life has passed, I only wish the best for my children. Life is hard here and parents do not have time for the children. I am around to look after my son otherwise I would not advise my daughter to work. People say that they cannot live on one salary. I do not think that this is true. I would tell the mothers that their first priority should be the children, not material goods. If two people are working, the family would need two cars and half the salary would just be spent in paying for child-care not counting the taxes. What is the point of it all? I do not think that it makes much difference if the



mother stayed at home. I know that I could not spent much time with my own children. After school, they used to come to the shop and of course it was a different environment. There were other family members around and there was the Jamā'at khāna which was part of our lives. Here things are different but who would listen to us elders? People would say we are old and we should keep quiet. The greatest problem here is the children. If they do not cultivate the right 'habits', they will be lost.

I stay in Vancouver because of my daughter and because of Jamā'at Khāna. If I joined my son in California, I would be lonely. Besides, I do not know whether I would be able to fit into the family.

Life histories of the elders reveal a pattern of development which revolve around age and gender. The physiological stages of adolescence and adulthood coalesced culturally to the extent that young boys and girls were expected to assume adult responsibilities early in life. A common pattern was that schooling finished at a relatively young age and by the time a boy was thirteen or over he would be assisting his father in the family business (most of which were retail stores) or working outside in order to acquire experience. A male elder recalled:

We might not have studied but we have anubhav (experience) which has been acquired over years.

Likewise, by the time a girl reached the age of eleven, she would have acquired basic skills to run a household, where cooking was a significant pursuit. Socialization into adulthood was oriented towards the specific goal of marriage and procreation. Men earned a living for the family while women assumed the responsibilities of being mothers, wives and daughters in-law. The latter entailed entering into a network of kinship relations.

In the Social Sciences, a considerable amount of discussion has focused on the issue of the significant family unit in pre-industrial society. It has been argued that the assumed existence of the extended family unit during this time was a misconception and that the essential functioning unit was that of



the nuclear family (Laslett 1972; Berkner 1975). Among Ismailis, the joint family unit comprising of ego's family and that of his father was as common as the nuclear family type. In Vancouver, there has been a developing trend towards the nuclear unit.

Table VI
Residential Patterns Of Ismailis In East Africa And Vancouver.

	Extended Family	Nuclear Family	Total
East Africa	48	52	100
Vancouver	20	80	100

Note: Extended family included three generations. (Data collected during field work).



In spite of the two types of family units as shown in the above table, it is necessary to note that the quantitative data does not fully reveal the complexity of relations which exist among kin. An elderly female recalled that although she never lived with her mother in-law, very close ties were maintained to the extent that whenever her husband got her a present, her mother in-law got exactly the same thing. Discussing residential patterns an informant explained:

I lived with my uncle as much as I lived with my parents.
Sometimes, I think that I had two fathers.

Kinship relations are beset with contradictions and ambiguities. They contain elements of restraint as well as freedom, rights and privileges as well as duties and obligations. A talented seamstress explained:

I have always been fond of sewing. When I got married, I thought I would not get much time to sew. I was very happy when my sister in-law and myself worked out the following arrangement. She would do all the cooking in the house while I would do all the stitching. I had so much practice over the years that I have now become quite talented in stitching. When we were in Uganda, I wanted to open my own shop (sewing) but my father in-law refused as he thought that I should stay in the house.

The above example as well as my observations indicate that the elders played a key role in 'mediating' contradictions as well as possible conflicts. While this is commonplace among pre-industrial societies, what needs emphasis is that often the mediating process took place in an intangible manner over a period of time. From various anecdotes collected during fieldwork, we can observe that the very presence of the elders was sufficient to contain conflicts, so that they did not lead to the severance of ties. I was often told that in business where three to five brothers worked together, it was commonly the father who played a crucial role in maintaining unity. One of the ways in which the elders were able to perform such a role was through less



involvement in material activities. For example, in the domestic scene an elderly woman would, ideally, do the least amount of work. Nevertheless, she would take a keen interest in kin relations, and would be instrumental in sustaining ties and containing conflicts.

The distinct role of the elders was also reflected in the cultivation of spiritual life. This meant spending a greater amount of time in Jamā'āt Khāna, and performance of moral duties on a larger scale. This notion was tangibly expressed in seva (service to the Imām and, by extension, to the Jamā'āt). Mehdi explained:

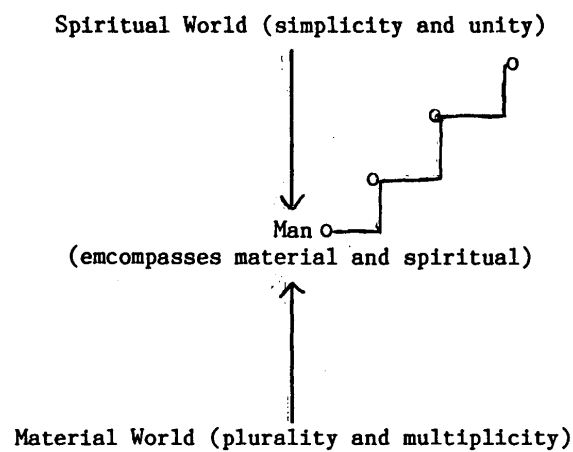
When we die, God will say: 'I did not send you to earth merely to pray'. He will ask: 'Your fellow being was sick, did you go to see him? Your fellow being was thirsty, did you give him water? Your fellow being was hungry, did you feed him?'

In the end Mehdi added that while the responsibility to help one's fellow beings falls on everyone, it is the elders who bear the greater obligation because, when they take the necessary action, the whole family reaps the spiritual benefits. In other words, as a person grew older, the larger became the range of his moral obligations. From the family, the obligations expanded into kinship, leading on to the community. In their traditional role, Ismaili elders present a symbolic model of spiritual life exemplifying moral support, advice, hospitality, knowledge (acquired through experience), and a unitive center integrating kinship ties. Significantly, the gender roles are less marked at old age, and both men and women enjoy the authority and respect accorded to them by other members of the family. In their roles, the elders personify the quality of simplicity (deemphasis on gender) which is an attribute of spiritual life. The role of the elders compared with the adults is charted in the following diagram.



Diagram 31

Model Of Ismaili Cosmos Conceived In Terms Of 'Journey Of Man'



- Key: o Upright posture of man signifying his involvement in material world (adult stage).
- └ Posture of genuflection representing the ascent of man (old age)



In discussing the role of the elders in the present milieu, an adult male informant remarked:

When I thought of the elders in East Africa, I always associated them with leaders. Here I associate the elders with the idea of retirement.

The above comment tellingly points to a fundamental change in the role of the elders among Ismailis, though it should be emphasised that such a development is common in post-industrial societies. The manner in which Ismaili elders have been affected by the prevailing factors can be understood in two contexts: (a) situational factors and (b) attitudinal change.

We would very much like to look after our elderly parents. After all, it is our tradition. However, circumstances in this country are different. Both my wife and myself work and we have a young family. As soon as we come home in the evening my wife cooks supper, there is the cleaning to be done and after that we have to bathe the children, spend some time with them and tuck them into bed. Where would we find the time to spend with our parents? They would expect us to take them to Jamā'at Khāna in the evenings and this would not be possible everyday. We live in separate dwellings and we visit my parents at least once a week. You see, our main problem is that of time.

The above extract from the conversation with a male respondent is representative of the situational factors which have contributed towards the marginal status which elders occupy within the family structure. The developing trend within the community is towards nuclear family units, as we have already noted. The significant members within such units are parents and their children. Modified extended family systems were considered as being transient by the respondents:

In some families, elderly parents (or parent) live with their married son. This is because of necessity. I do not think that in future such an arrangement will continue.

The above viewpoint from a respondent was shared by other informants. The elders who have continued to live with their children do so out of necessity



arising from financial limitations or poor health or because they feel that they have a 'function' to perform within the household. The elders make themselves useful by babysitting (a job mainly done by women and in some cases men) and cooking (exclusively done by women).

That there seems to be a potential source of conflict and strain in households where the elders live with their son is confirmed by two other situations. During fieldwork, I came across a number of elders living with their unmarried or widowed daughters, a situation which would not be considered as appropriate, traditionally. Such parents, in spite of having sons had opted to live with their daughters fearing the emergence of strain or conflict. I also came across elderly widows or widowers who moved around so that they would spend limited amount of time with one son. In this case, they would be considered as 'guests' and therefore earn greater respect in the household. Elders who live in the household with their sons felt very obliged (because they considered it as a favour). One elderly female informed me that she never came for breakfast early in the morning and would always retire to bed early at night so that she would not be 'in the way'. Another couple explained that when their son had guests for dinner they would not stay around for long and would retire early for the night. All in all it appears that the elders do not have an important status in the household of their married sons.



Before we explore the issue concerning attitudinal change, I would like to emphasise that an informal supportive network exists for the elders where sons, daughters, and members of the kinship and the community play a central role. Service needs of the elders are met adequately. Apart from receiving financial help from the children, the elders are taken to outings, shopping, and Jamā'at Khāna. There are communal outings organized by a 'senior citizens committee'. These outings are exclusively for the elders and inadvertently the elders are treated as a separate group which needs special tending. Summary of the life style of the elders is given in table VII.



Table VII
Major Characteristics Of Ismaili Elderly Respondents

	Males (15=N)	Females (15=N)	Total
Age			
65-64	6	8	14
75-79	4	3	7
80-84	4	2	6
85+	1	2	3
Country of Birth			
India	4	3	7
East Africa	11	12	23
Living Arrangements			
live with spouse	7	3	10
live with son	5	4	9
live alone	2	3	5
live with daughter	1	3	4
'moving around'	0	2	2
Kin in Vancouver			
no. of children	45	30	75
close relatives	60	75	135
Visiting Patterns (average per month)			
children	04	07	11
kin	03	05	08
Religious Attendance (average per month)	22	27	49
Total Respondents	15	15	30

Note: Data used in the table was collected during field work.



The aged must live this life
of aloneness
And yet,
Once upon a time,
she was so vital - the life's blood -
for her family.
We build the foundation of our lives
Upon
the sacrifice of our parents.
My friends
You - the one with the young child
in your arms.
the one with the bulging briefcase;
the one who is going skiing
this weekend -
Your mother, your grandmother,
Is she alone tonight?
Can you feel the silent agonies
of her heart
tugging at your heartstrings.

The above extract from a poem composed by a young Ismaili⁴ captures the
'plight' of the elders in the face of attitudinal change brought about by the
dominant cultural values of self-reliance and 'individualism'. Many Ismailis
describe their experiences in Canada in terms of 'openness'. One informant
explained:

Back in East Africa, it seemed that our lives depended upon
padlocks. I constantly remember the number of doors that I
had to bolt. Life was very closed. What did we do in East
Africa? We went to Jamā'āt Khāna in the evenings and
weekends. We only had three options: (a) going to cinema (b)
eating out and (c) going to a picnic. Take life in Canada.
Canada is a land of opportunities. There is much to be done
here - sports, T.V., video, outings, restaurants, you name it.
All that we have to do is work hard and you can enjoy life
here. For those who wish to study, there are innumerable
opportunities.

In his article on "A Modified View Of Our Origins: The Christian Beginnings Of
Modern Individualism" (1982:1-27), L. Dumont distinguishes between the
individual in terms of speech, thought and will, a 'sample of mankind as found
in all societies' (universal) and the 'independent, autonomous, and thus



essentially non-social moral being, who carries our paramount values and is found primarily in our modern ideology of man and society' (modern). From this point of view the universal model is referred to as holistic and the modern model as individualistic.⁵ Other studies on 'American Culture' have focused on the individual as its dominant characteristic (Mason 1955:1264-1279 & Du Bois 1955:1232-1239).⁶

The attitude of 'individualism' accompanied by self-reliance is brought about by the existence of choice, in spite of the fact that what one chooses to do can be determined by the mass-media. As opposed to their homeland, larger numbers of Ismailis are exercising choices such as: going to Jamā'āt Khāna (which normatively is an everyday activity) or staying at home. The 'choices' which Ismailis exercise in their new homeland seem to be affecting the integrity of the family unit. Traditionally, recreational activities were family oriented - going to the cinema or a picnic was a family affair. In the modern context, each member of the family has different interests. In some cases these interests differ markedly and are observable in the household in terms of T.V. programs, and food preferences.

From the above we can establish that the context of the family, kinship ties, and the authority which the elders enjoyed within the community does not exist as a coherent whole. Research on minority communities have attributed the existence of 'a viable traditional support system' which can adequately maintain the traditional role of the elders (Trela & Sokolovsky 1979:124). Although close ties are maintained between the elders and their kin, the framework within which such an interaction takes place is radically altered. Traditionally, as noted earlier, the impact of the elders was felt intangibly over a period of time. Conversations with informants revealed that many times



the elders did not do much, rather it was their presence which made all the difference. The present interaction between the elders and their kin is in the context of 'special time'. Like many other activities, special time is allocated for visits and interaction. The elders are given the message, loud and clear, that for their own well-being and happiness they should try to become independent.

(ii) Life Histories - Adults

Liyakatali is originally from Uganda. He is presently working as a computer analyst.

When I was young, my parents used to put a lot of emphasis on education. There are three things which I remember doing for a long time. They were studies, sports, and Jamā'āt Khāna. My mother insisted that all of us (I have two sisters and two brothers) should go to 'khane'. We used to live close to Jamā'āt Khāna and the latter was an integral part of my life. My father was very strict and quite short tempered. Nevertheless, I was very fond of him. I was still at University when the 'famous decree' was issued. We were asked to leave Uganda. It was quite a shock. But we got over it - family, friends, community, Religion - all of these helped. I continued my studies here and got married at the age of twenty four. My wife is a legal secretary and is not working at the moment as our son is still small (one and a half years old).

In the beginning when I got married, we all lived together (my parents and one sister). But then there were too many conflicts about housework, going out, and so on. We thought it best to live separately. We always visit our parents during week-ends, that is on Sundays. On Saturdays we usually go out with our friends or by ourselves. Life is hard here but we like it. There are lots of opportunities and good facilities for education.

Mustafa migrated to Canada from Kenya seven years ago. He is a businessman with three children, two boys aged 15 and 13 and one girl aged 10.

After I finished schooling in Kenya, my father sent me to England to study law. I have specialized in Business Law. When I returned, I got a posting in Zaire with a communal institution. I decided to settle in Canada mainly because of children's education. I think that there are greater



opportunities here and besides there is a large Ismaili community. I like it here though life is pressurized and stressful. My sons attend private school - there is more discipline and I understand that the quality of education is much higher.

My parents and two of my brothers and one sister all live here. We get together as a family once a month. We would like to meet more often, it would be nice if we could but time is a problem. The children have so many activities to attend - sports, school outings, Religious education classes. It seems that we are always on the move. We attend Jamā'at Khāna twice a week - that is a must or else how will the children know about our traditions?

Nazlin (from Uganda) is married with two daughters aged 13 and 8 She works as a legal secretary.

I only studied upto High School. I got married at an early age. I was only seventeen. Back at home, I was a house wife. My husband did not want me to work. When we came here, I stayed at home for two years after our first child was born. I was bored at home so I decided to work. My husband and myself argued about it; I was so unhappy that finally he had to give in. We have lots of relatives here and we often visit them especially parents, brothers and sisters. I think that it is important for the children. I take my daughters at my father in-law's place. I just feel somehow, he would say certain things that would sink in. It is difficult to raise children here. My eldest daughter does not like to come to 'khāne'. In fact she does not like to put on dresses. She says she feels comfortable in trousers. I give in but I do make sure that at least twice a month she must come to 'khāne'. I try to explain to her - sometimes it works, other times it does not. She is very determined and seems to be going her own way. The other day, I happened to read a letter from her girlfriend - nothing important. She was very upset that I looked at it. She likes to have a 'private' life - her own room, music.

I think that part of the problems are due to the fact that my husband and myself did not get on well. My daughter feels insecure. Things are all right now but it is hard to explain to a child.

Shelina is married with two sons aged 16 and 11. Presently, she works as a secretary.

My childhood was hard. My father did not do too well in business and we had to struggle for a living. I could not finish schooling as I had to work to support our large family. I am the eldest - I have three brothers and one sister. After marriage, I stayed home for the children though I continued to



work part time in Nairobi. We moved to Canada because we have relatives here both from my husband as well as my side. Also, we want our children to acquire good education and we feel there are better opportunities here.

We moved here six years ago. My son did very well at High School. He got admission to do Business Administration at the University. He attended the first semester and then dropped out saying that it does not interest him. He is too involved in sports. Sports at the moment seems to be his whole life. He intends to do a course in Hotel Management. I hope he pursues it. These days children do not listen. They seem to know what is best for them. Even my younger son is surprisingly independent. He has started doing paper route and has opened his own bank account. When I was working, I used to give my whole salary to my father. People become too independent here. My sons often have arguments with their father about T.V. programs. They all have different interests. We have bought a small T.V. set for the children so that there are no clashes. The other day I told my younger son to pick up his shoes and he says: 'Mummy make sure that you also put your shoes in the right place.' I cannot always go along with what the children say.



More than any other group, adults (parents) seem to capture more tangibly the play of forces between traditionalism and the values and practices of the host society. Being nurtured in an ethos governed by traditional values, adults are exposed more directly to 'modernism' as expressed in North America. Unlike the elders, the North American experience of the adults is acquired in two forms: (a) direct and (b) indirect (through the children). We shall examine both the forms in order to establish how the adults steer their own lives as well as those of their children in terms of attitudes and the values which have been instilled into the adults from childhood and those emergent in the present milieu.

Before we proceed, it is necessary to define the terms 'traditionalism' and 'modernism' as understood and described empirically by the adults. The adults understanding of these terms is as follows:



Table VIII

Traditional And Modern Attitudes And Practices.

<u>Traditional Values</u>	<u>Modern Values</u>
<u>Jama'at Khana</u>	secular education/work emphasis on technical sciences
formal religious education	recreational activities - greater variety
informal instruction at home kinship ties	Canadian friends - includes other communities
traditional foods	non-traditional foods
active participation in communal activities	mass media - T.V., video pop music
traditional forms of recreation - Indian movies, music.	drinking, smoking, drugs pork, sexual permissiveness - actively discouraged.

Jamā'āt Khāna is the bulwark of Ismaili tradition. During my field-trip to Scandinavia, the greatest concern of the Ismailis living there was that they did not have a Jamā'āt.⁷ One informant summed up the sentiments shared by others:

We feel that we are locked in a golden cage.

There are two Jamā'āt Khānas which have been constructed in the West (Vancouver and London) in order to 'reflect an Islamic mood' which will blend 'harmoniously and discreetly with the surrounding environment'. The Jamā'āt Khāna forms 'an important focus for the religious and social life of the community' (The Aga Khan 1983:18).⁸ As we have established in this study, it embodies a cognitive model based on the categories of material and spiritual



life. At one level, the whole of the life of an Ismaili is contained in the symbol of the Jamā'at Khāna. The latter incorporates a continuum which ranges from worship and ritual to food and informal conversation that takes place after the completion of the prayers. A female informant explained:

I do not have any kin here but the Jamā'at is like a family.
I forget everything when I come here. Jamā'at Khāna is everything to me.

Nevertheless as noted earlier, situational and attitudinal factors have effected a deep-rooted change among Ismailis. In many contexts, what was once an everyday activity has become special, and what was ordinary has become festive. Attendance in Jamā'at Khāna has been manifestly affected. Information obtained from fifty adults revealed the following figures.

Table IX

Attendance in Jamā'at Khāna (Adults)

	Daily	2-3 times p.w.	Festive occasions only	Total
East Africa	42	5	3	50
Vancouver	23	12	15	50

Note: Data included in the table is based on a period of three months

The crucial factor which requires consideration is that if Jamā'at Khāna is not attended as much as it was traditionally, what are the alternative pursuits? Behavioural patterns indicate that the reasons cited for lack of daily regularity in religious attendance include traditional as well as modern factors as defined above. Mothers with young children consider it to be a 'religious duty' to stay at home. One mother explained:



After all, it is the fīrmān of the Imām that children who are under ten should be in bed by half past seven.

Likewise, family and kinship obligations such as nurturing the sick have often been cited as reasons for not attending Jamā'āt Khāna. In East Africa this was not considered to be a major problem as house servants and maids were commonly employed in Ismaili homes. This is not to say that all the activities pursued traditionally were considered as being religious. There were occasions and times when a purely 'material pursuit' was taken up during Jamā'āt Khāna time. One instance which can be cited is the popularity of Indian movies shown in Drive-in cinemas in East Africa. A sizable number of Ismailis resorted to this spot on Saturday and Sunday evenings. Nevertheless, such events did not pose as alternative 'models' counterpoised to going to Jamā'āt Khāna.

In the light of the above, recreation activities in Vancouver seem to alternate, and in some respects take the place of Jamā'āt Khāna attendance. The situation is complicated by the fact that, by and large, adults and their children have different interests. The following is a list of activities pursued jointly as well as separately.



Table X
Recreational Activities Of Adults And Children.

Number of times per week (average)			
Total respondents = 20			
	Adults	Children	Adults/Children
T.V.	6	11	2
Music			
Indian	4	0	2
Pop	0	6	0
Movies			
Indian	2	0	0-1
North American	0-4	1-2	0-1
snack Bars/ restaurants	1	1-3	1
Disco	0	1	0
Visiting kin	2	0	0-1
Shopping	2	1	0-1
Sports	1	6	0-1

Note: Data for the table was collected during fieldwork.



Table X above indicates that the activities which are followed jointly by parents and children are traditional: watching Indian movies or visiting kin. Modern activities which form part of the 'youth sub-culture', such as disco and many sports, are exclusively for the young. While this may appear to be commonplace, (because of the age difference between adults and children they are bound to have different and even exclusive interests) the whole situation from the point of view of the adults is conflict-prone and ambiguous. Let us take a few examples.

Conflicts or potential conflicts arise in the household. We saw from the life history of Shelina that her sons clashed with their fathers about T.V. programs. The conflict was contained rather than resolved by obtaining a second T.V. set for the children. Further observations and interviews show that Shelina's case is not an isolated one. This does not mean that a constant battle is waged in the living room. I came across a number of compromises which were worked out to suit the interests of both parties. Two of the common solutions observed were the allocation of set hours and alternation of days between parents and their children. In such situations, adults may end up watching their childrens 'programs' (like a rock video) while children may be induced to watch their parents choice, like an Indian movie. In this way each becomes acculturated into both modernism and traditionalism.

Another context in which mutual acculturation occurs relates to eating. We have already noted that two types of foods are eaten in Ismaili households, traditional and Euro-Canadian. Here again, an attempt is made to accommodate the preferences of adults and those of the children - though it is important to note that it has been worked out over a decade. Mothers have indicated



that when they first came to Canada, they used to prepare a three-course traditional meal. As children grew up they started stating their preferences for foods like hamburgers or shake and bake chicken.

Other contexts reveal a model of alternation. Given the differing interests, the children, as they grow older, show resistance to accompanying their parents when the latter visit kin. One mother explained:

My son who is thirteen years old dislikes visiting my parents because he finds it boring. But I insist that he should come with me at least once a month though I go every week. I feel that while my father is talking, he (the son) might pick up something which would be very useful. It is very important for him to listen to 'traditional talk'.

Likewise, sports and disco which on the whole are exclusive to children are 'bounded' activities. Parents tend to put restrictions on them. One mother explained:

My daughter can go out only once a week. After that she dare not even come and ask if she can go out again. She knows that she will not get the permission.

Most of the parents I talked to indicated that their children have to be home by certain times. This does not mean that in every instance the rule of thumb is followed. Parents related instances when the children come home later than the allocated time. In such situations parents either give in or show displeasure. The pattern that emerges as being significant is that of constant negotiation and modification of various situations as they arise. As children attempt to follow what the parents wish, and face the pressures they apparently feel from the peer group, they are exposed to two modes of reality. The first mode is embodied in the cognitive model which the parents seek to activate, while the second mode of reality is the emerging model based on the notion of individualism.



Another instance which illustrates the principle of alternation may be described as follows. Shayroz has two sons aged eleven and nine. Shyroz believes that she can give the best of both the worlds (traditional and modern) to her children. She takes as much interest in the school work and activities as in ensuring that her children attend Jamā'āt Khāna three or four times a week. It so happens that, among other days, religious education classes are held on Saturday mornings for children up to grade XII. Shyroz's sons are also keen about soccer which is played at the same time. Shyroz decided that she was going to alternate. She told her sons that last year they played soccer. This year, starting in September, they would be attending religious education classes.

Traditionally, the conflict between recreational activities and attending Jamā'āt Khāna would not have been as sharp as it is today. The reason being that the traditional cognitive model was implicitly present in almost all areas of life. The implicit assumption in most families is that the parents symbolically embody and activate the model in their behaviour and attitude. One mother explained:

I do not do anything consciously for my son. But I am sure that the values and traditions which I carry around must pass through to my son. The important thing is for the mother to be around her children.

Out of fifty mothers that I talked to, thirty seven expressed the wish to keep their children, during their pre-school years, with Ismaili baby-sitters. The assumption here is that these children would 'pick up' part of their cultural heritage from such baby-sitters. While this model may be at work during the early stages of growing up, it is soon alternated with the emerging model arising from interaction with the host society. Some mothers have remarked on the marked differences noticeable once the child interacts within the broader



framework of the larger society. Several mothers referred to the difficulty of continuing to use the vernacular language once their children had started school or went to day care centres. Another informant related that her child had become 'aggressive' once she started going to day care.

When she wants something done, she says 'do this' or 'do that'. We never use this kind of language at home.

Given the above observations, I noticed that mothers and fathers had accepted the fact that they cannot raise their children in a traditional manner and that there were occasions when they had to 'give in'. A couple with a fourteen year old daughter related that they would really not like their daughter to go out at night with her friends but they also feared that if they stopped her she would be deprived of the opportunity to make friends. The mother added:

We have to trust our children and let them have their own lives too.

Yet parents appeared also to be fearful because they did not understand the 'world of their children'. Their greatest fear was that their children might pick up the habits of smoking, drinking, or taking drugs. Linked with this is sexual permissiveness, which parents feel abounds in North American society. Most parents felt that their children were vulnerable to developing the above habits. The only safety valve which they felt existed for them was the Jamā'āt Khāna, and an exposure to traditional ways such as kinship interaction and Ismaili friends.

Alternation between tradition and modernism has also affected the adults in a forceful manner. Adults do not at all times act within the traditional framework but, as we have noticed, alternate between going to Jamā'āt Khāna and pursuing recreational activities. The major differences between parents and children are due to the diversification of interests as well as differing



perspectives of life in Canada. Before exploring this further, let us turn to the experiences of Ismaili youth in Canada. Consider the following life histories:

(iii) The Youth

Mehboob is 17 years old. He emigrated to Canada six years ago from Kenya. Presently, Mehboob lives with his parents and thirteen year old brother.

My mother always tells me that we came here because of our education. I like it here. I do not miss Kenya at all. The school system is fine except that there is not much discipline here. Since I finished High school, my mother has been pressing me to go to University. I do not think that I am the University type. I just want to finish a technical course - something that would allow me to work. I like to be independent. At the moment, I am working in a motel and I am supporting myself.

I go to Jamā'at Khāna two times a week. I would miss Jamā'at Khāna if I were to go somewhere where there are no Ismailis. I go to Jamā'at Khāna to pray and meet my friends. I also like to play sports, especially soccer. I have my own circle of friends - they are all Ismailis. At first, my mother used to restrict the number of times I could go out and the time when I had to be home. Now I can make my own decisions. My mother gets upset when we stay out too late but we are not up to any mischief as the adults tend to think. I do not smoke or drink. One day somebody offered me some beer. I tasted it but frankly I did not like it. Some of my friends smoke and drink and it all depends on how they have been brought up.

Riyaz is from Uganda. He has lived in Vancouver for the last twelve years. Riyaz is 22 years old and studying at the University of British Columbia - second year in Science. Riyaz's household consists of his parents, one brother who is 25, and a 19 year old sister.

When I came from Uganda, I was quite young. I remember that life was a struggle. My mother used to get up at five to go to work. She worked in a hospital as a cook. My father also had long hours of work. All of us, myself, my brother and sister went to school. My mother is not working at the moment. Right now the most important thing in my life is to



get into Medicine. It is tough and very competitive. I study most of the time. My mother complains that I do not spend enough time with the family. She would like to visit the relatives. I cannot do that at the moment - my time is very precious.

I go to Jamā'at Khāna two or three times a week. I do not think that my mother can understand how much work I have to do. This does not mean that I do not love my family. I would do anything for them. At the moment it is difficult because there is a harsh world out there. I know that if I did not work, I will be nowhere.

Femina is 25 years old. She finished schooling in London three years ago. She is a designer by profession and presently she is helping her father in business.

I was born in Kenya and after my senior Cambridge, my father sent me to London for further education. I attended a boarding school and I studied under very strict conditions. We were not allowed to go out after certain hours and there were a host of regulations which we had to follow. Nevertheless, most of us broke the rules. We would use windows to come in and go out after scheduled hours. I followed the others. I think that there was a lot of pressure from other girls. I was not accepted unless I became like them. I was fat so I went on a diet. I even started to drink and smoke. It is strange. I do not do it anymore. I had no trouble in giving up these habits. Now that I am no longer in it, I think about it. I think that I felt very insecure when I was in London. The insecurity was partly a result of family circumstances. We were never really settled in Nairobi - there was always talk of moving and I really did feel that I did not belong anywhere. Besides there were differences between my mother and father.

Now that we are here, everything is fine. I have my roots and I do not think that I have major differences with my parents. My father has changed a lot - he tries to look at things from my point of view. He was very strict once but now he does not mind when I go out and try to live my own life. I think that he trusts me and that makes a lot of difference.



Navida is 19 years old. She is going to college and is specializing in Business Management. She emigrated from Tanzania seven years ago and presently lives with her parents and two younger brothers.

I was only twelve when we moved to Canada. I consider myself to be a Canadian. Both my parents are working and we have a good family life. I would say that in some ways I have a different kind of life. I have my own tastes about dressing and I have my own friends (Canadians as well as Ismailis). We often go together to movies, picnics, parties and sometimes I spend week-ends at my girl-friends house. My parents 'know' all my friends that is to say that they have met them. If I take too much freedom that is stay out till very late at night (after 11 a.m.) my parents get very upset. Otherwise, we do not have major differences. Sometimes I feel that my parents do not understand me. I do my share at home. I do the vacuum cleaning, laundry and help with numerous chores.

My parents expect me to go to Jamā'āt Khāna at least three times a week. On other days, I have been trained to say my du'ā at seven thirty sharp. I have continued with this practice although at times it is difficult; I have homework to do in the evenings and sometimes I may be out with my friends. I visit my grandpa once a month and occasionally I go out with the family, visiting relatives and enjoying outings. Everyone says that the youth have problems here. Speaking for myself and my Ismaili friends, I do not think that there are any major problems which cannot be solved. We all have differences with our parents. Sometimes they give in and sometimes I give in. We, the youth need space to grow - we need to make our own decisions but we also need guidance which our parents can provide.

The life histories of youth point to two forms of life-styles. The first pertains to family-oriented activities which, to some extent, re-enforces the traditional model. The family go out together (that is young adults and their parents) most frequently to Jamā'āt Khāna and associated communal outings.

The second form of life-style entails participation in the so-called 'youth culture', which forms part of the process of adjustment in the changing environment of the Ismailis. Implicitly, it is understood by parents and their young adults that they have different recreational interests. I learned from one parent that when he was travelling with his son, they took turns



listening to two kinds of tapes: one with traditional songs and the other with pop music. While this alternation is accepted and negotiated in the process of daily living, what is found perturbing is the lack of understanding between parents and their children. One mother said:

My daughter goes to parties and she is allowed to stay out only till 11 p.m. She usually leaves the house around eight. I would like to know, what happens in the three hours that the kids have been out. We have no way of checking and I really do not know what the kids are up to.

The response of one youth was:

Well, our parents have to trust us. I cannot always explain to my mother what we do when we are out. A lot of the times we just sit and talk.

Apart from recreational activities, parents are becoming increasingly aware of the 'new dimensions of thought and attitude' which children are picking up from school and the associated peer environment. We have already noted instances of 'aggressiveness' and 'individualism' related by parents. Another development which has created a rift between parents and children relates to the whole area of explanation and the so-called 'meaning of things'. This is felt very strongly, and parents feel that if they cannot explain things to the children, they will lose them to the wider society.

Shelina expressed the view:

My son wants explanations as to why we do not eat pork and why he has to attend religious education classes. I try to explain, but it is difficult to reason out everything. There are certain things which we just have to do and it is only at a later stage that the results are known. I was never given any 'explanations' when I was growing up.

Shelina's friend who was also present added:

The children want answers immediately. My grandmother used to say that if you want to taste the sweetness of a mango, you have to wait and let it become ripe.

Feeling at a loss, parents tend to encourage the children to turn more towards the community - attending Jamā'āt Khāna, religious education classes



and participating in the institutional activities such as voluntary corps, girl guides, boy scouts and other administrative bodies. In fact, an increasing number of young people are being absorbed in these organizations. Although this provides an ambience of community life, the latter is counterpoised with the youth sub-culture.

Table XI
Communal Involvement Of Young Adults

Age group: 14 to 25 No = 50	
Type of Activity	No.
Volunteers	11
scouts/guides	08
Institutions	
(a) Administration	10
(b) Religious education	11
(c) Sports	10

Note: Data included was collected during interviews with Ismaili families.



Perception Of Life In Canada

The differences observable in recreation can be extended to the perception of Canadian life by the elders, the adults and the youth. The marked contrasts of the three groups can be understood in the following contexts:

Primary experiences of Canadian life of elders derive from neighbourhood units, visits to the doctors, shopping malls, and through the mass media. The elders, owing to limited social and geographical mobility and the handicap of language, perceived Canadian life as being pervaded by attitudes of independence and permissiveness. An elderly informant related:

My female neighbour is divorced. I think she is so 'liberated' and independent. She manages the whole house so well. She has two sons (aged 16 and 19) and I think she gives them too much freedom. They go out and come back late at night. But I admire this woman. She drives her own car and does so many things like gardening.

My observations indicate that there is limited interaction at this level, and by and large, the elderly informants affirmed that beyond formal greeting of 'Hello' and remarks about the weather, conversation was minimal. I gathered that such limited interaction took place outside the house, therefore veiling the 'inner life' of individual households. This is a significant change as the former experience of the elders (and that of other Ismailis) took place in an open spatial environment of home and the neighbourhood. From the mass media and what they observed on the streets, the elders had confirmed opinions of the life-style of people living in the larger society. A summary of this life-style included such characteristics as hard work accompanied by enjoyment and luxurious living, smoking, drinking and sexual permissiveness.



Adults derive their impressions of the host society from mass media, limited interactions with the neighbours, work place and the involvements of their children. The reactions of the adults appeared to be mixed. Conversations revealed that adults have met with resistance as well as acceptance. Nevertheless, the adults repeatedly informed me that interaction with members of the larger society was limited and situational, that is confined to a specific context, like work. I came across several instances in which adults related how in East Africa work included a network of social relationships and was not tightly scheduled like a fifteen minute coffee break.⁹ In Canada, adults feel temporally and spatially confined in the work situation. Adults are aware of the fact that the primary emphasis is on productivity, the bottom-line being dollars and cents. Traditionally, the core of Ismaili life comprised of social ties which, as we have observed, was a form of spatial expansion. Most significantly, most of the adults in East Africa went home for lunch. Eating was considered to be a social activity (an Ismaili woman prepared traditional foods for social groups).

The young have, of course, penetrated the life of the host society more deeply. Their experiences are more divergent. They are involved in a greater number of activities and peer interaction. The younger members of the community are going into the professions (computer technology, law, medicine, pharmacy, and other technical areas) which are considered to be the hallmarks of modern society. Talking to this group of people, I discovered that they did not stereotype Western societies as strongly as their parents or grandparents. Undoubtedly, as with others, the picture created by the mass media of 'modern life' continued to remain vivid but, beyond this, the young indicated an awareness of differences of life-styles of Canadians. While they affirmed the qualities of 'independence' and 'permissiveness' as being



dominant, they nevertheless were aware of 'traditional forces' at work among Canadians. One youth remarked:

The parents of my friend are more strict with him than my own parents.

Within the community itself, the younger members are given added importance.

An Ismaili leader remarked during the appointment of the new members in the administrative infrastructure in March 1984:

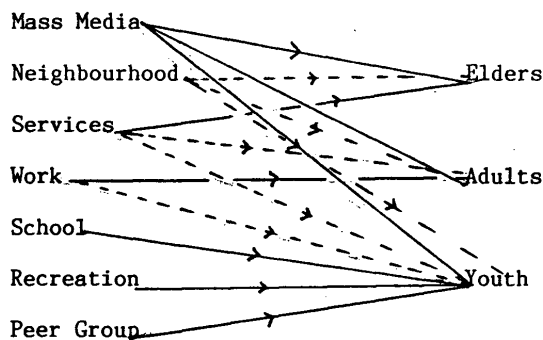
It is the Imām's wish that the younger members of the Jamā'āt should occupy important portfolios in our institutions.

The sources of perception of the three groups are diagrammed as follows

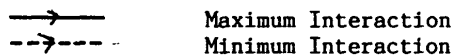
Diagram 32

Perception Of Canadian Life

Mediums of Transmission



Key:





In his comparison of the East and the West (more specifically, the Japanese and the Americans), Hall draws upon the images of the heart and the mind contending that these are two different modes through which learning is acquired (1983:85-99). In the East greater emphasis is placed on the 'heart' which stands for self-knowledge and enlightenment. In the West, the focus is on the mind, specifically 'the left hemisphere of the cortex, which is the portion of the brain that is concerned with words and numbers' (ibid:90). This framework produces two different forms of time: in the East, time springs from the self and is not imposed while in the West time is an outside force which dictates a form of life which is logical, bounded, and linear. Among Ismailis, the process of modernization seems to have taken place through a shift from the 'heart' to the 'mind'. The elders, as they have experienced life, represent a form of learning that is akin to the heart. In their conversations, the elders use symbols, images and anecdotes all of which represent a way of acquiring self-knowledge. The youth, requiring 'explanations', logical, and bounded forms of thinking, represent the Western form of learning geared towards the mind. A significant development which needs to be emphasised is that the elders, the adults and the youth appear to be living in separate compartments which decisively lead to different forms of spatial and temporal experiences. These experiences, which are by and large confined, can be identified as follows:



Group	The Elders	The Adults	The Youth
Context	Neighbourhood	Work	Peer Group
Experience	Confinement	Confinement	Paradoxical*

Note: * The youth experience a feeling of 'freedom' within the peer in-group but as this experience is not shared with the other groups (family, community or the larger society), it remains confined.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have established that the process of compartmentalization entailing tradition and change has an internal component. Presently, in the changing milieu of the Ismailis, the elders do not occupy an important status within the family or the community. Adults oscillate between the two areas of material life and spiritual life. We have seen this epitomized in recreational activities and Jamā'at Khāna respectively. While we can assume (on the evidence established in part II), that the participants attending Jamā'at Khāna are exposed in varying degrees, to the cognitive model revealing the 'manifestation of the spiritual elements', the same assumption cannot be extended to the daily life. Traditionally, the activities of daily life complemented the 'spiritual' act of going to Jamā'at Khāna. However, presently, Jamā'at Khāna and recreational pursuits are counterpoised. Recreational pursuits are 'legitimate' activities (excluding the area of prohibitions like drinking and smoking) and could have been accommodated within the cognitive model except for the following:

- (a) Recreation activities take the place of and do not complement the act of going to Jamā'at Khāna.



(b) The activities pursued by elders, adults and the young are divergent to the extent that in some cases they are exclusive. This is tellingly revealed by the fact that there are 'special' recreation programmes organized specifically for senior citizens by communal institutions. As to the 'youth sub-culture', the adults have expressed incomprehension of the 'hero-worship' of such figures as Michael Jackson, and the attraction towards the pop music.

All in all, these developments do not promote interaction between elders, adults, and the young. Lack of such an interaction has given rise to differing perspectives held by elders, adults and youth. The elders are the bearers of symbolic thought expressed tangibly in the form of images and anecdotes as well as intangibly in terms of 'presence', attested by the fact that on many occasions it was the presence of the elders which made a difference in containing potential conflicts. More importantly, the advice given by the elders came to fruition over a relatively long period of time. The adults make important decisions regarding the upbringing of children with little reference to the symbolic thought personified by the elders, with limited perception of life in Canada, especially the 'world' of their children. The youth, on the other hand, continually alternate between two forms of life style: home/Jamā'āt Khāna, and that encountered at school/work and within the peer group. The implications of the processes of compartmentalization between home and the larger society, and within the family are discussed in the concluding chapter of this study.



Footnotes:

1. For the life-history method in Anthropology refer to: Langness L.I. & Frank G, Lives: An Anthropological Approach To Biography, (1981).
2. The three categories of elders, adults and youth have been defined in terms of roles. Elders constitute that group of Ismailis who spend minimum time in work situation. By contrast, the adults apart from working at home or outside, constitute a group that assumes parental responsibilities. The youth are young adults who live in the same household as their parents and are at school or have recently started work.
3. Part of the material in this chapter was presented at a symposium on Ethics And Aging, 'Ethical Implications Of Growing Old Among Ismailis In Vancouver,' (University of British Columbia, Aug.1984,); the material is considered for publication in an anthology edited by Earl Winkler.
4. Kassam S. The Old Lady, Newsletter: The Ismailia Editorial Board for British Columbia, vol.3, (May 1984).
5. Louis Dumont, 'A Modified View Of Our Origins: The Christian Beginnings Of Modern Individualism,' Religion: Journal Of Religion And Religions, vol.12, (1982), pp.1-27; 'The Functional Equivalents Of The Individual In Caste Society,' Contributions To Indian Sociology, Vol. VIII, (1965) pp.85-99.
6. American Anthropologist vol.57, (1955).
7. There are about 200 Ismailis residing in Scandinavia.
8. The speeches of the Aga Khan regarding the Ismaili Centre in London and the Burnaby Jamā'at Khāna have been published in Hikmat, Vol.II, No.2, (1983) pp.18-21.
9. Ismailis who have visited East Africa in the last five years have commented that the life-style is changing and the work situation is now tightly scheduled. My account of the East African life relates to the way in which my informants experienced it as they grew up and were nurtured into adulthood while they were living in East Africa.



Chapter 9

Conclusion

In this final chapter, I shall first review briefly the ground covered in this study. Following this, I discuss the emergent patterns of the Ismaili world in their new environment in relation to external as well as internal forms of compartmentalization. Lastly, I examine the implications of the acculturative experiences of the Ismailis in relation to technical time and core culture time.

The intent of this thesis was to produce an understanding of the Ismaili traditional world and identify the dynamics of transformation of this tradition in a secular Western environment. The introductory chapter defined the concepts of material and spiritual which inform the Ismaili tradition, discussing the framework in which they are articulated, namely time and space. Using literary materials and ethnographic data, part I examines the basic constructs of material and spiritual in different contexts: speculative thought, affective content and lives of individual Ismailis. Part II proceeds to discuss the ritual tradition where the material and the spiritual are invoked showing that these constructs image a cognitive model of an inward spatial movement into the 'heart' symbolizing a state of repose and unity. In part III, an examination of the culinary practice and life cycles of individuals reveal that in their everyday lives, Ismailis experience space and time through an outward movement of multiplicity and activity, engendering a network of social relationships. Here, I continue to discuss the experiences of the Ismailis in their new environment showing that in fact the



participation of elders, men, women, and youth in the Western milieu has led to the emergence of two forms of compartmentalizations: the external (larger society) and the internal (the family). Below, I discuss these compartmentalizations in relation to time and space.

Time as a core system of all cultures can serve two counter functions: it can create enduring relationships through 'invisible threads of rhythm' (Hall 1982:3) or it can create hidden walls which prevent social interaction. Hall's comparative approach to the study of time (1961, 1977, 1982) shows that in the Western secular states there are two forms of time, the separation of which has created considerable amount of tension: technical time and core culture time. Hall contends that core culture time is the foundation on which interpersonal relations rest. Core culture time allows one to experience life in a more integrated and holistic manner. By contrast, technical time fragments, defines, requires control, is linear and language-bound.

The acculturative experiences of the Ismailis in the Western Canadian environment is by and large informed by the technical time of the West. We have observed that Ismaili women have attempted to combine the two roles of nurturing and occupation through re-organization of their domestic life. In cooking, many women have resorted to using the method of semi-preparation whereby part of the food is prepared the previous night or early in the morning and the rest completed in the evening, amounting to a chopping of the time. Women also make extensive use of modern kitchen gadgets (blenders, food processors, 'kitchen magic') and have adopted Euro-Canadian foods based on the criteria of 'fast and easy'. Considering that women bear the dual burden of working in the home as well as outside, these adoptions appear to be practical. Nevertheless, the point which I would like to emphasise is that in



fact the modern organization of time and space in Ismaili households amounts to a definite shift from the traditional core culture time to the modern technical time. Traditionally, when Ismaili women spent four to five hours in the kitchen or at home, it was a time of social relationships. While cooking, women would interact with the children, other women in the house (including elders), the neighbours, and visitors who would drop by informally. The way in which Ismaili women spent time at home led to the creation of 'open space'.

Work situations where Ismaili women spend seven to nine hours a day are governed by technical time. Lunch breaks and coffee breaks are scheduled quite rigidly, and social relationships (which form the core of the material life of the Ismailis) are confined to the work place, leading to a sharp demarcation between private (home) life and the public (work) life. Spatially and temporally, Ismaili women have condensed their domestic life and their nurturing role to accommodate the working life of the labour market. In the latter, their experiences are that of confinement which is the hallmark of technical time.

The emergence of the internal compartmentalization within Ismaili households is a function of the separation of core culture (ritual) time and technical time. In our discussion of the life histories, we observed that within the framework of the cognitive model of material and spiritual, the elders image qualities of spiritual life. In actual fact, the elders image core culture time. We noted that the contributions of the elders are intangible: it is their presence which make a difference in the creation of open space (cultivation of social relationships), their perception of life is expressed through symbols, images, anecdotes (as opposed to logical sequences which explain things), and their perceptions of the present are linked with an



expectant future, requiring the cultivation of patience and perseverance. An elderly woman explained:

These days people want to reap the benefits without work; if you do not grind the wheat, how can you ever expect to eat it.

The participation of the adults in the larger Canadian society is governed by technical time. Apart from the work situation, the most intense exposure to life in Canada is acquired through mass media. By and large, mass media (Newspapers and T.V.) promote and make visible forms of life that are governed by technical time. In fact, the mass media have done very little to depict the other side of family life in Canada where core cultural values (norms and traditions which promote social interactions) could undoubtedly be observed. The programmes on T.V. give importance to soap operas like Dallas and Dynasty which I understand are quite popular with Ismailis and Canadians at large. The picture that emerges of families in Canada is that they are constantly in a state of crisis, and the values which govern their life are those of aggression, power, infidelity, permissiveness, and sexual promiscuity. Beyond this, the women are also becoming attracted to pop psychology as promoted in women's magazines and popular literature. I once asked a mother with a teenager how she was coping with exposure to the larger society. Her response was: 'I keep in touch with all the latest books (psychology) that are published here.' Further conversation brought home to me the fact that it did not even occur to the mother that there might be valuable insights contained in her own tradition with regard to raising children. Likewise, I gathered that positive parenting classes (based on modern psychology) are becoming popular with Ismaili parents so much that the administrative structure of the council has formed a sub-committee called 'Positive Parenting Committee.' By and large, outside speakers who are considered to be professionals have been brought in to address Ismaili



parents. I asked one mother how she found these classes. Her response was: 'very good, I learnt a lot.' When I asked what did she gain from these classes, she replied: 'They teach you how to talk and to explain to your children.' Talking and explanation form strong elements of technical time.

The youths are exposed to both technical time and limited core culture time. The experience of technical time is acquired at school (modern education draws heavily on psychology and rigid scheduling of time, disregarding the cultural factors) and mass media. The exposure to core culture time takes place during interactions with peer group when relationships are formulated. As this experience is not shared with other members of the family (it is limited to the youth sub-culture which receives distinct recognition in the Western world), it remains spatially confined.

All the Ismailis, regardless of gender or generational differences, participate in core culture time during attendance in Jamā'at Khāna. Here, they enter into a different, and deeper level of existence; they are exposed to religious sacra, (images, symbols, affective content of ritual) and they occupy an 'empty' space which leads to the experience of 'openness'. The Ismailis while they are in the Jamā'at Khāna become brothers and sisters. Solidarity and oneheartedness are affirmed through ritual performances and prayers and not through language-bound thought and explanations. Both Victor Turner (1978:7-17) and Susanne Langer (1957:288-294) affirm the importance of the experience of exposure to symbolic content (core culture time), which can provide 'mental anchorage' in the modern world. Discussing pilgrimage as a liminoid phenomenon, Turner states (ibid:13-14):



All religious rituals have a strong affective aspect, whether this be muted or displaced or given full liturgical expression. Symbols, which originate in elevated feeling as well as cognitive insight, become recharged in ritual contexts with emotions elicited from the assembled congregants. ...incalculable hopes that the religion's paradigms and symbols will restore order and meaning to a sad and senseless state of personal and interpersonal affairs - and from these hopes derives the pilgrim's proverbial happiness.

For the Ismailis core culture time (the spiritual) has meaning in relation to daily life (material life). As stated earlier, the material only exists by affirming its opposite, the spiritual. The spiritual is the source of life for the material, yet in itself the spiritual is infinite and unfathomable. In the context of the two temporalities: transmission and interpretation, the time of interpretation enters into the time of tradition and the tradition in turn is lived only in and through the time of interpretation. The acculturative experience of the Ismailis can be understood through two forms of time and space, both of which are separated and compartmentalized in their new homeland. The creation of space is a function of the way in which time is used. Within the larger society, the Ismailis participate and experience technical time and its correlated limited and confined space. In the Jamā'at Khāna, the Ismailis experience core culture time which expands and opens up space.

In addition, the process of compartmentalization is accentuated by the attitudes of the Ismailis who are accommodating in their material life in the larger society and are exclusive regarding their spiritual life as practised within the community.

The Burnaby Jamā'at Khāna epitomizes these attitudes. The aspirations of Ismailis were summarized by informants as follows: 'to integrate into the society in which we live as well as maintain our traditions'. Overtly, the



Jamā'āt Khāna meets these aspirations as it blends 'discreetly and harmoniously with the surrounding environment' as well as provides an 'important focus in the social and religious life of the local Ismaili community'. There is no doubt that the building forms part of the surrounding environment to the extent that it is not distinctly visible to motorists driving on Canada Way. However, the prayers and the religious ceremonies which take place in the Jamā'āt Khāna are exclusively for the Ismailis. Likewise the leased locations which serve as Jamā'āt Khānas do not have any signs indicating they are places where Ismailis congregate twice a day.

Behaviour patterns of the Ismailis indicate that they make a conscious effort to remain socially 'non-visible' in seeking identification with the larger society. Ismaili women are never seen wearing saris at work. I gathered from informants that packed lunches consist commonly of sandwiches and fruit. If a traditional food item is included, it would be something which is socially accepted like samosas. One mother related that she often puts samosas in her daughter's lunch kit as she can share them with her teacher (English Canadian), who happened to be fond of them. My observations indicate that Ismailis are very polite to their neighbours and attempt to maintain friendly relations with people at work. However, the Ismailis have maintained an exclusive attitude regarding intra-community life and relationships. The Ismailis are endogamous and are sensitive to the media and the outsiders who seek to get information about their way of life. The Ismailis by being accommodating in their public (material) life and exclusive in their spiritual life have inadvertently compartmentalized their lives.



The major finding of the study is that the tradition, which was a complex of strict complementarities, has now become compartmentalized, diluting the force of the complementary relationship. This appears to be a function of increased participation in the "technical" time (confining social relationships) of external public life as opposed to the "core culture" time (promoting social relationships) of the internal home life of families, particularly as women have entered the labour force in the public domain. In addition, the process of compartmentalization is re-enforced by the attitudes of the Ismailis as they are accommodating to the public (material) life and maintain exclusiveness regarding community (spiritual) life. Compartmentalization seems to have weakened the force of secularization which might be thought to affect a migrant religious community settling in a secular state. The Ismailis continue to give importance to both forms of life: the material and the spiritual albeit separately. In the context of core culture time, it appears that this form of time, which promotes relationships, remains confined within families in the larger society and within the community life of the Ismailis. As technical time and core culture time have affected the process of acculturation among Ismailis, I close this chapter with a few remarks on time.

Hall makes the observation that time and space are categories which function in an out-of-awareness form. Two of his works on time are entitled "The Hidden Dimension" (1966) and "The Silent Language" (1961). The fact 'that it (time) might be experienced in any other way seems unnatural and strange, a feeling which is rarely modified even when we begin to discover how really differently it is handled by some other people' (Hall 1961:19). One of the major concerns of this study is to bring into awareness the processes involved in the experience of acculturation of a minority community, like the



Ismailis. This study shows that acculturation in a secular Western state involves confrontation with and adaptation to technical time. We have also noted that core culture time (the well-spring of the life of all cultures) as it exists in Western societies has remained invisible as it is given a marginal place in the public sphere (work, social interactions outside home and the mass media).

In his work on "The Tuning Of The World" (1977), Murray Schafer, recommends the study of a world soundscape in order to free modern man from 'the dangers of an indiscriminate and imperialistic spread of more and larger sounds into every corner of man's life' (ibid:3). Schafer shows that the problem of noise pollution is a result of the way in which time-and-space are handled as sounds are contained in space and time (ibid:5,118-119). Advocating the restoration of the 'integrity of inner space', Schafer concludes that all research into sound must conclude with silence. Schafer writes (ibid:256):

The contemplation of absolute silence has become negative and terrifying for Western Man. Thus when the infinity of space was first suggested by Galileo's telescope, the philosopher Pascal was deeply afraid of the prospect of eternal silence. "Le silence eternal de ces espaces infinis m'effraie."

It is the recovery of empty (infinite) space and stillness that will free us from the grip of technical time so that we might be able to discover a world where, as Rūmī states it: "speaking is without letter or sounds" (Schafer:259) or as Schafer recalls (ibid:259):

I recall also the slow stillness of certain Persian villages, where there is still time to sit or squat and think, or merely to sit or squat; time to walk very slowly alongside a child on crutches or a blind grandfather; time to await food or the passage of the sun.

Although this study is focused on the acculturative experiences of the Ismailis, emphasising the Ismaili traditional view of space and time, it



points to a need for research into timescape and spacescape which has relevance for modern man who lives in a global village where all human beings relate to each other through invisible threads of rhythm or through hidden walls.

To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:
A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;
A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break, and a time to build up;
A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;...
A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away;
A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.

(Old Testament: Ecclesiastes, iii, 1-8).

The time has come for recovery and restoration of human relationships based on stillness and space of fulfillment.



1985-09-19 -Ritual and Daily Life of Ismailis -Thesis (996)

realpatidar.com

289

Bibliography

- Aga Khan III
1954 The Memoirs Of Aga Khan. New York: Simon & Shuster.
- The Aga Khan Award For Architecture
- 1978 Architectural Transformations In The Islamic World,
Seminar Two: "Conservation As Cultural Survival".
Philadelphia: University Science Center.
- 1979 Architectural Transformations In The Islamic World,
Seminar Four: "Architecture As Symbol And Self
Identity".
- 1981 Architectural Transformations In The Islamic World,
Seminar Five: "Places Of Public Gathering In Islam".
- Algar, Hamid
1969 "The Revolt Of The Aga Khan Mahallati And The Transference Of
The Ismaili Imamate To India," In Studia Islamica, vol.29,
pp.55-81.
- Allport, Gordon
1960 The Individual And His Religion. The Macmillan Company:
New York.
- Anderson, J.N.
1964 "The Ismaili Khojas Of East Africa: A New Constitution And
Personal Law For The Constitution," In Middle Eastern
Studies, vol.1, pp.21-39.
- Barth, Fredrik (ed.)
1969 Ethnic Groups And Boundaries: The Social Organization Of
Cultural Difference. Boston: Little Brown & Co.
- 1975 Ritual Knowledge Among The Baktaman Of New Guinea.
New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Barthes, Roland
1979 "Towards A Psychosociology Of Contemporary Food Consumption,"
In Food And Drink In History (R. Forster & O. Ranum ed.).
Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, pp. 166-173.
- Beane, W. C. & Goty, W. G. (ed.)
1975 Myths, Rites, Symbols: A Mircea Eliade Reader (vol.2).
New York: Harper Colophon Books.
- Beck, Lois & Keddie, Nikki (ed.)
1978 Women In The Muslim World. Cambridge: Harvard University
Press.

realpatidar.com



1985-09-19 -Ritual and Daily Life of Ismailis -Thesis (996)

realpatidar.com

290

- Berger, P. & Luckmann, T.
1966 The Social Construction Of Reality: A Treatise In The Sociology Of Knowledge. New York: Doubleday & Company Inc.
- Blackman, M.B.
1982 During My Time: A Haida Woman. Washington: University of Washington Press.
- Burckhardt, Titus
1976 Art Of Islam: Language And Meaning. Kent: Westerham Press Ltd.
- Burridge, Kenelm
1969 Tangu Traditions. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
1979 Someone, No One: An Essay On Individuality. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Cassirer, Ernst
1944 An Essay On Man: An Introduction To A Philosophy Of Human Culture. New Haven And London: Yale University Press.
- Canard, M.
1965 "Da'wa," In Encyclopaedia Of Islam, vol.2, pp.168-170.
- Colin, G.S.
1960 "Barakāt," In Encyclopaedia Of Islam, vol.1, p. 1032.
- Corbin, H.
1975 "Nasir Khusraw And Iranian Ismailism," In Cambridge History Of Iran (J.A. Boyle, ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, vol.4. pp.520-542.
1983 Cyclical Time And Ismaili Gnosis. London: Kegan Paul International.
- Donaldson, D.M.
1933 The Shi'ite Religion: A History Of Islam In Persia And Irak. London: Luzac And Co.
- Dossa, Parin
1983 "The Shi'a Ismaili Muslim Community In British Columbia," In The Circle Of Voices: A History Of Religious Communities Of British Columbia (C.P. Anderson, T. Bose. & J. I. Richardson ed.). Lantzville, British Columbia: Oolichan Books, pp. 232-239.
- Driedger, Leo
1975 "In Search Of Cultural Identity Factors: A Comparison Of Ethnic Minorities In Manitoba," In Canadian Review Of Sociology And Anthropology, vol.12 pp.150-162.

realpatidar.com



1985-09-19 -Ritual and Daily Life of Ismailis -Thesis (996)

realpatidar.com

291

- Douglas, Mary
1966 Purity And Danger: An Analysis Of Concepts Of Pollution And Taboo. New York: Frederick A. Praeger.
- 1970 Natural Symbols: Explorations In Cosmology. New York: Random House, Inc.
- 1972 "Deciphering A Meal," In Daedalus, (Winter), pp.60-81.
- Du-bois, Cora
1955 "The Dominant Value Profile Of American Culture," In American Anthropologist, vol.57, no.6, pp.1232-1239.
- Dumont, Louis
1965 "The 'Individual' In Two Types Of Society," In Contributions To Indian Sociology, Vol.VIII, pp.8-61.
- 1966 Homo Hierarchicus. Gallimard: Paris.
- 1982 "A Modified View Of Our Origins: The Christian Beginnings Of Modern Individualism," In Religion: Journal Of Religion And Religions, vol.12, pp.1-27.
- Eickelman, Dale
1977 "Time In A Complex Society: A Moroccan Example," In Ethnology, Vol.XVI, No.1, pp.39-56.
- 1981 The Middle East: An Anthropological Approach. New Jersey: Prentice-hall, inc.
- Eliade, Mircea
1959 The Sacred And The Profane: The Nature Of Religion, (W.A. Trask, trans.). New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc.
- Elkin, Frederick.
1964 The Family In Canada. Ottawa: Canadian Conference On The Family.
- Esmail, A & Nanji, A.
1977 "The Ismailis In History," In Ismaili Contributions To Islamic Culture (S.H. Nasr, ed.). Tehran: Imperial Academy Of Philosophy, pp.224:264.
- Evans-Pritchard, E. E.
1940 The Nuer. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- 1949 The Sanusi Of Cyrenaica. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- 1956 Nuer Religion. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Fernandez, James
1982 Bwiti: An Ethnography Of The Religious Imagination In Africa. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

realpatidar.com



1985-09-19 -Ritual and Daily Life of Ismailis -Thesis (996)

realpatidar.com

292

- Fernando, Tissa
1979 "East African Asians In Western Canada: The Ismaili Community," In New Community, Vol.VII, No.3. pp.361-368.
- Fyzee, A.A.
1942 A Shi'ite Creed. London: Oxford University Press.
1974 The Book Of Faith: The Da'ā'im al-Islām (Pillars Of Islam Of al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān b. Muḥammad al-Tamīmī, trans.) Bombay: Nachiketa Publications Limited.
- Geertz, Clifford
1973 The Interpretation Of Cultures. New York: Basic Books, Inc.
- Gellner, E.
1981 Muslim Society. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gennep, Arnold van
1960 The Rites Of Passage (M.B. Vizedom & G.L. Coffee, trans.). London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Hall, E.T.
1961 The Silent Language. New York: Premier Book, Fawcett World Library.
1966 The Hidden Dimension. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co.
1977 Beyond Culture. Garden City, New York: Anchor Books.
1983 The Dance Of Life: The Other Dimension Of Time. Garden City, New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday.
- Hodgson, M.G.S.
1968 "The Ismaili State," In The Cambridge History Of Iran, (J.A. Boyle ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, vol.5. pp.422-482.
1955 The Order Of The Assassins. The Hague: Mouton & Co.
- Hollingsworth, L.W.
1960 The Asians Of East Africa. London: Macmillan Press.
- Hollister, J.
1953 The Shi'a Of India. London: Luzac And Company.
- Ihde, Don (ed).
1974 Paul Ricoeur, The Conflict Of Interpretations: Essays In Hermeneutics. Northwestern University: Evanston Press.

realpatidar.com



1985-09-19 -Ritual and Daily Life of Ismailis -Thesis (996)

realpatidar.com

293

- Ishwaran, K. (ed).
1971 The Canadian Family: A Book Of Readings. Toronto & Montreal: Holt, Rinehart And Winston Of Canada, Limited.
- 1980 Canadian Families: Ethnic Variations. Canada: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited.
- Ivanow, W.
1935 "Organization Of The Fatimid Propaganda," In Journal Of The Bombay Branch Of The Royal Asiatic Society, vol.9, pp.37-52.
- 1942 The Rise Of The Fatimids. London: Oxford University Press.
- 1948 "Satpanth," Collectanea, vol.1, pp.1-54.
- 1935 Kalami Pir: A Treatise On Ismaili Doctrine (trans.). Bombay: A.A.A. Fyzee Esq.
- 1950 Tasawurat: Nasirrudin Tusi (trans.). Holland: E.J.Brill.
- 1938a "Tombs Of Some Persian Ismaili Imams," In Journal Of The Bombay Branch Of Asiatic Society, vol.14, pp.49-62.
- 1938b "Some Ismaili Strongholds In Persia," In Islamic Culture, vol.12, pp.383-396.
- Jafri, Husain
1979 Origins And Early Development Of Shi'a Islam. London and New York: Longman Group Ltd.
- Langer, Susanne.
1967 Philosophy In A New Key. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Langness, L.I. & Frank, G.
1981 Lives: An Anthropological Approach To Biography. Novato, California: Chandler And Sharp.
- Laslett, M.
1972 Household And Family In Past Time. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Leach, E.
1976 Culture And Communication: The Logic By Which Symbols Are Connected. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude.
1949 The Elementary Structures Of Kinship. Boston: Beacon Press.
- 1962 The Savage Mind. Great Britain: Garden City Press.
- 1963 Structural Anthropology. New York: Anchor Books.

realpatidar.com



1985-09-19 -Ritual and Daily Life of Ismailis -Thesis (996)

realpatidar.com

294

- 1965 "The Structural Study Of Myth," In Myth: A Symposium (T.A.Sebeok ed.). Bloomington: Indiana University Press pp.81-106.
- 1968 The Origin Of Table Manners. New York: Harper And Row Publishers
- 1969 The Raw And The Cooked: Introduction To A Science Of Mythology. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers.
- 1973 From Honey To Ashes. New York: Harper & Row.
- Lewis, B.
1939 "An Ismaili Interpretation Of The Fall Of Adam," In Bulletin Of The School Of Oriental And African Studies, vol.9, pp.691-704.
- Lienhardt, G.
1961 Divinity And Experience: The Religion Of The Dinka. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mason, L.
1955 "The Character Of American Culture In Studies Of Acculturation," In American Anthropologist, vol.57, no.6, pp.1264-1279.
- Michell, G. (ed.)
1978 Architecture Of The Islamic World: Its History And Social Meaning. New York: William Morrow And Co. Inc.
- Nanji, Azim.
1974 "Modernization And Change In The Nizari Ismaili Community In East Africa - A Perspective," In Journal Of Religion In Africa, Vol.VI, pp.123-139.
- 1978 The Nizari Ismaili Tradition In The Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent. New York: Caravan Books.
- 1983 "The Nizari Ismaili Muslim Community In North America: Background And Development," In The Muslim Community In North America (E.H. Waugh, B.A. Laban, & R.B. Quereshi ed.). Alberta: The University Of Alberta Press, pp.148-164.
- 1982 "Ritual And Symbolic Aspects Of Islam In African Contexts," In Contributions To Asian Studies, Vol XVII, pp.102-109.
- Nicholson, Reynold
1968 The Mathnawi Of Jalālu'ddīn Rūmī (trans.), Vols.I-VI. London: Luzac & Co. Ltd.
- Paul, G (ed).
1977 Multiculturalism In Canada: Third World Perspective. Toronto: Prentice-Hall Inc.

realpatidar.com



1985-09-19 -Ritual and Daily Life of Ismailis -Thesis (996)

realpatidar.com

295

- Phillips, Herbert
1973 "Comment On David Mandelbaum's, 'The Study Of Life History: Ghandi'," In Current Anthropology, vol.14, pp.200-201.
- Pirbhai, G (ed).
1950 Selected Ginans Of Pir Sadr al Din, Pir Shams, Pir Satgur Nur, and Pir Hasan Kabir al Din. Mombasa: H.H. The Aga Khan Ismailia Association For Africa.
- Pocock, David
1967 "The Anthropology Of Time Reckoning," In Myth And Cosmos (John Middleton ed.). Garden City, New York: The Natural History Press, pp. 303-314.
- Poonawala, I.K.
1977 Bibliography Of Ismaili Literature. Malibu: Undena Publications.
- Rosaldo, M.
1980 Knowledge And Passion: Ilongot Notions Of Self And Social Life. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Said, E.
1978 Orientalism. New York:Pantheon.
- Schimmel, Annemarie
1975 Mystical Dimensions Of Islam. Chapel Hill: The University Of North Carolina Press.
- Schafer, R. Murray
1977 The Tuning Of The World. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart.
- Soler, Jean
1979 "The Semiotics Of Food In The Bible," In Food And Drink In History (R. Forster & O. Ranum ed.). Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, pp.126-138.
- Shils, Edward
1981 Tradition. Chicago: University Of Chicago.
- Singer, Milton
1972 When A Great Tradition Modernizes: An Anthropological Approach To Indian Civilization. New York: Praeger Publishers.
- Singer, Milton & Cohn, Bernard (ed.)
1968 Structure And Change In Indian Society. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company.
- Trela, J.E. & Sokolovsky, J.H.
1979 "Culture, Ethnicity And Policy For The Aged," In Ethnicity And Aging (Gelfand & Kutzik ed.). New York: Springer Publishing Co.

realpatidar.com



1985-09-19 -Ritual and Daily Life of Ismailis -Thesis (996)

realpatidar.com

296

- Turner, Victor
1967 The Forest Of Symbols: Aspects Of Ndembu Ritual. Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press.
- 1969 The Ritual Process: Structure And Anti-Structure. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company.
- 1978 Image And Pilgrimage In Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Virani, H.K.
1954 The Philosophy Of Our Religious Ceremonies, vol.I (Gujerati). Bombay: Ismailia Association For Bharat.
- Walker, P. E.
1974 Abū Yaʿqūb Al-Sijistānī And The Development Of Ismaili Neoplatonism, Ph.d. dissertation. Chicago: Department Of Near Eastern Languages And Civilizations:
- Wehr, Hans
1971 A Dictionary Of Modern Written Arabic. New York: The Spoken Language Services.
- Wensinck, A.J.
1965 The Muslim Creed. New York: Barner & Noble.
- Yusuf, Ali (tr.)
1977 The Glorious Qurʾan. U.S.A.: American Trust Publications.

realpatidar.com



Appendix 1.

Fieldwork: Data And Methods

In the following pages, I give a brief account of my fieldwork among Ismailis in Vancouver.

The choice of my fieldwork location was based on my interests in seeing how a religious tradition is transmitted and interpreted in the process of acculturation in a secular Western environment. As an indigenous ethnographer, the fieldwork experience proved to be a personal quest for self-knowledge regarding an encounter of two cultures (the East and the West).

The content of my data, like that of most Anthropologists, derives from responses of my participants, casual encounters, semi-structured interviews, taped conversations, and the observations I made in formal as well as informal situations. The two primary locales from which information was gathered are: the Jamā'āt Khāna (place where Ismailis congregate) and the home. My experiences with respondents and in field situations brought home to me the two ways in which Ismailis organize time and space. The first one is ritual time (leading to a state of unity), and the second one is 'daily' time which the Ismailis regard as being material, leading to a state of multiplicity. Given this framework, I focused on the ritual performances and the everyday lives of the Ismailis.

Taking a cue from Victor Turner (1967:19-47), my analysis of rituals is based on three classes of data:



(a) External form and observable characteristics. This kind of data was collected from participant observation focused on the following:

- the periods when the rituals are performed.
- the context of the network of relationships.
- the occasion and the number of times they are performed.
- the objects, symbols, gestures, images and verbal and non-verbal forms of communication.
- forms of expression accompanying the rituals.

(b) Indigenous interpretations obtained from specialists and laymen.

Extensive interviews were conducted with five specialists and conversations with the laymen included one hundred people.

(c) Significant context - the data collected in (a) and (b) was utilized to work out the significant context or frame concepts surrounding the performance of the rituals. In addition, references were made to historical sources and exegetical material.

In my conversations with Ismailis in the households, I discovered that food was an important mode of communication and expression revealing the two processes of tradition and change. As food is prepared primarily by women, I studied their roles in the traditional context of nurturing as well as the emergent one of careers. Following this, conversations with other members in the households revealed the importance of life cycles. Therefore I focused on the following areas:



(a) The culinary system.

- kinds of foods eaten in the households.
- number of times meals/snacks taken.
- preparation of food - how, when and by whom.
- involvement of kinship.
- structuring of family life.
- role and status of women.
- hospitality - code of conduct.
- interaction of the traditional and the modern through the medium of food.
- organization of space and time.

(b) Life cycle of individuals.

- what parts of the tradition are reiterated at home and in other settings.
- how do individuals introduce variations into their lives given situational factors and attitudinal change.
- what are the circumstances when it becomes impossible to follow the given formal pattern of behaviour.
- how are deviations from the structure justified and explained
- bio-data
- critical experiences of life
- expressions and understanding of Canadian experiences.

Contact was established through personal acquaintances and random selection from the Ismaili directory. As an Ismaili ethnographer, I had additional opportunity to meet a number of informants on 'chance' encounters.



Background information of the forty households which I visited is provided in Table XII. Out of these, I visited twenty five households at least two or three times.

Fieldwork is the matrix of Anthropology. In varying degrees, Anthropologists acquire a rich and a fulfilled field experience. As an indigenous ethnographer, initially, I had reservations whether my experience within what appeared to be 'a known territory' would give me a sense of accomplishment. In retrospect, my experience in the field was a journey into time and space as I tried to relive the traditional world of the Ismailis and shared with them their experiences of adaptation to the Western technical time and space zone. As an ethnographer, I 'travelled' through various territories separately (covering the experiences of women, the elders, the adults and the youth) and in an integrated form, sharing the space and the time when Ismailis congregate as one group in the Jamā'at Khāna.

No = 40

realpatidar.com